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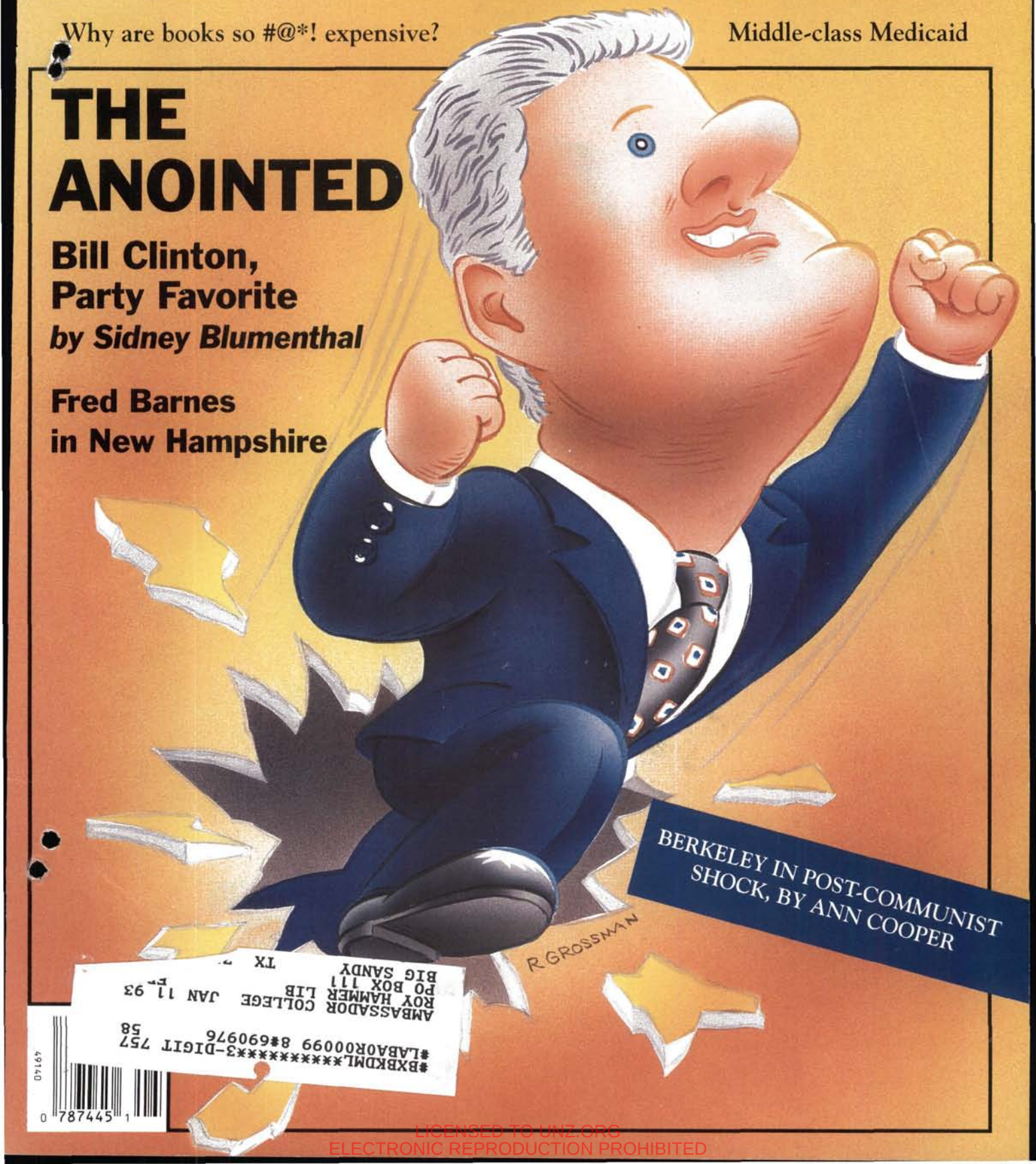

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CORRESPONDENCE

Get well soon

To the editors:

Robert Kuttner ("Sick Joke," December 2) offers one individual's negative experience with managed care as testimony for the failure of the entire industry. Tragic examples are easily found in any health care setting, including those countries with national health insurance programs that make no attempt to protect patients against the provision of unnecessary and harmful procedures. Managed care (in the form of network arrangements or utilization review programs) attempts to rationalize the health care system by pursuing a systematic, integrated approach to delivering quality health care at an affordable cost.

There is ample evidence to illustrate managed care's success in reducing medical inflation, not only for individual companies, but for entire regions. For example, managed care plans have been available to residents of the Minneapolis-St. Paul region for the past twenty years; almost one in two residents receives coverage through an HMO. Studies show that medical costs in Minneapolis-St. Paul are 10 percent to 18 percent lower than the national average; there are fewer unnecessary hospitalizations as well.

Contrary to Kuttner's assertion that companies are "more interested in shedding costs" than in "making long-term commitments to their employees," employers are concerned with the quality of health care provided and are not forcing employees into inferior programs. According to a recent HIAA study, 81 percent of employers surveyed reported that they offer more than one type of health plan. Among employees who have a choice between different plans, half choose a managed care program. Studies consistently show that enrollees in these plans are very satisfied with the care they receive.

Kuttner is deceiving many when he suggests that the government, which has consistently eroded care for the poor, disabled, and elderly, can develop a universal health care system that will solve our health care problems. A private-public partnership that uses managed care as a cornerstone for building on the strengths of our current system is the best opportunity we have for providing health insurance to all Americans.

CARL J. SCHRAMM
Washington, D.C.

The writer is president of the Health Insurance Association of America.

To the editors:

"Sick Joke" provides an extremely inaccurate and one-sided account of a lawsuit in which Michigan Biodyne, an American Biodyne subsidiary, is currently engaged. In the lawsuit, which involves Lawrence Megge and his wife, the specifics of the case clearly and consistently indicate that the patient was properly treated and did not in fact commit suicide. Rather, Megge and his wife died in a very unfortunate but completely accidental car crash.

Numerous facts support this conclusion. First, a nationally recognized expert we retained to review the case has found that the facts do not support the conclusion that the death was a suicide. Second, plaintiff's own expert witness confirms that the car's path off the road could most certainly have been the result of an accident. Finally, the patient's family filed for automobile accidental death insurance one month after filing the lawsuit against us alleging suicide and inappropriate treatment. In the insurance filing, the Megges' lawyer stated explicitly that the death was the result of an accident and not intentionally caused.

The article also alleged that the emergency room doctors were "overruled" by Biodyne psychologists, and that Megge was offered "drop-in therapy" and phone contact instead of hospitalization. The emergency room physicians who saw Megge were, of course, free to admit him if they felt a medical need existed, regardless of Michigan Biodyne's position. Obviously they did not feel this to be necessary. Rather than "drop-in" therapy, Michigan Biodyne provided Megge with intensive outpatient treatment. The treatment team, which included a fully-licensed psychiatrist and a Ph.D. psychologist, monitored the patient for suicidal intent and found that at no time was the patient suicidal or in need of hospitalization. The plaintiff's own expert witness physician has admitted that at the time of Megge's emergency room visits, it was not necessary to hospitalize the patient. Thus, the charge that Biodyne "tragically denied needed treatment" is absurd.

LISA SUENNEN
Barre, Vermont

The writer is vice president of American Biodyne, Inc.

To the editors:

In "Sick Joke," Robert Kuttner writes that the American Managed Care and Review Association (AMCRA) set up the Utilization Review Accreditation Commission, Inc. (URAC). He also states that Roger Taylor "organized" URAC. Not only are these statements contradictory, they are also inaccurate.

URAC was started by a consortium of individuals representing a wide variety of utilization review organizations, health service providers, consumers of health care services, and government regulators of the insurance industry. Although AMCRA sponsored the concept of creating URAC and Dr. Taylor provided leadership as URAC's first president, no single organization or individual can take responsibility for establishing it.

Kuttner says that URAC was created to establish minimal industry standards to "drive out sleazy operators." URAC was formed to develop and promulgate minimum industry standards for the emerging utilization review industry in order to promote the effective, efficient, and economical delivery of quality health care services in the United States. Participation in URAC's accreditation program is voluntary, and URAC has no authority to compel any utilization review organization to comply with the standards.

ROBERT J. BECKER, M.D.
ROGER S. TAYLOR, M.D.
Washington, D.C.

The writers are chair and president, respectively, of URAC.

Robert Kuttner replies:

Whether Lawrence Megge committed suicide and whether he received adequate treatment by Biodyne is now in litigation. Yes, the emergency room physicians were free to hospitalize Megge—but at their own expense. And therein lies the mischief.

Bodysnatcher

To the editors:

Opposition to the medical use of tissues obtained from induced abortions does not depend on the possibility that such use will encourage abortion, but on an application of the rules that govern medical experimentation in general (Washington Diarist, "Ghosts," by Morton Kondracke, December 2). These rules have long required that the experimental subject, or donor of tissue, give his consent, or, if he is dead or incompetent, that consent be given by a representative with his interests at heart. The problem for Kondracke, and for others eager to cannibalize fetal tissues, ought to be obvious—who's going to grant the requisite consent? The donor himself? He is dead and was incompetent. That leaves only the mother and the abortionist, who have disqualified themselves in a manner too clear to require comment. Who can grant consent? The answer is, no one.

Of course, ethical problems only exist for those with ethical scruples—not for those restrained solely by the fog of sen-

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timent. But is it too much to ask of Kondracke, if he really wants to promote bodysnatching of this sort, that he pay for it himself, rather than compelling me to pay for it through the mechanism of taxation?

TOM RILEY
Napa, California

Jams tomorrow

To the editors:

In "Spend" (December 23 & 30), Paul Krugman argues that we need to build more highways because our suburbs have been growing, and "if we fail to support them with the necessary facilities, our economy becomes snarled in traffic jams."

During the 1950s and 1960s we followed Krugman's advice and built highways leading to the suburbs. As a result, millions of people moved to the suburbs, thus causing traffic jams that Krugman complains about. It logically follows that if we build more highways, we will have even more suburban growth, and even more traffic jams (in addition to various nasty side effects, such as a death blow to our cities' tax bases, and energy waste resulting from increased car usage).

The type of infrastructure we invest in is as important as the amount of investment. If we spend more money on highways, we will have more suburbs, more traffic, and more traffic jams. If we invest money in mass transit instead, we will have fewer of all three.

MICHAEL E. LEWYN
Atlanta, Georgia

When the buck stops

To the editors:

In response to Matthew Rees's "Shot in the Arm" (December 9), which discusses offering financial incentives to women on welfare to use Norplant: I told Rees of a program our agency sponsors in which high-risk teens are paid a dollar a day not to get pregnant. The success of this program is attributed to the support group and counselors at the weekly meetings, which become very important in these girls' lives. The dollars are just the initial incentive to get them involved and become a minor reward for a deferred pregnancy.

Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains feels it is critical that the use of any birth control method be entirely voluntary. We believe women are capable of making good decisions on their own behalfs and in their best interests.

BETTINA R. PROCTOR
Aurora, Colorado

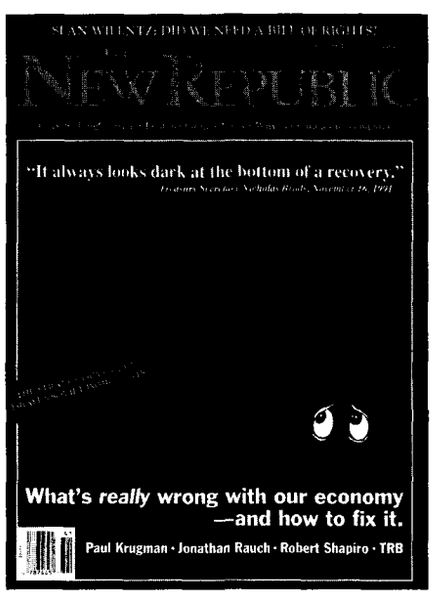
The writer is the director of public affairs for Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains.

Among the angels

To the editors:

In "Rogues Island" (November 25) David Segal refers to a bill extending, by thirty days, the time that the American Universal Insurance Company could take to go into bankruptcy and states that the bill "baffled onlookers" until it was discovered that the company was represented by my law firm. The inference created was that somehow this bill was sponsored by me, or benefited my law firm, or a client of my law firm.

These are the facts. The insurance company at issue was placed into receivership by the Department of Business Regulation for reasons of insolvency. My law firm had *never* represented this company. One of my law


NEW REPUBLIC
"It always looks dark at the bottom of a recovery."
What's really wrong with our economy —and how to fix it.
Paul Krugman · Jonathan Rauch · Robert Shapiro · TRB

partners, a regionally known specialist in insurance company receiverships, was appointed by the director of the Department of Business Regulation to serve as counsel to the director. At about this time, a bill was introduced into the General Assembly that pertained to the Rhode Island Insurance Insolvency Fund. The bill provided holders of insurance policies issued by insolvent insurance companies an additional thirty days of coverage by the Insolvency Fund. The effect of the legislation was to give the policyholders an additional thirty days to find new coverage and to require the Insolvency Fund to provide coverage for the additional period.

This legislation was introduced at the request of independent insurance agents within our state and was widely viewed as pro-consumer. The legislation had no effect upon the already insolvent American Universal Insurance Company or its receiver, the director of the Department of Business Regulation. I did not introduce the legislation, advocate its passage or failure, or even vote on it.

JOSEPH DEANGELIS
Providence, Rhode Island

The writer is Speaker of the Rhode Island House of Representatives.

David Segal replies:

If DeAngelis's firm is structured like most, when a partner makes money, the firm prospers. If it's not, he used his power to enrich a friend. DeAngelis is right in stating that the Department of Business Regulations, not American Universal, retained his partner. This clarifies who signed his partner's checks, but doesn't alter the substance of my charge.

DeAngelis's point that the legislation in question did not benefit American Universal is semantic misdirection. The company had gone under so the bill did not help it *as a company*, but its former policyholders were the sole beneficiaries of the bill since no other insurer was going bankrupt in Rhode Island at the time. That the law was clearly written with American Universal in mind was what sent up red flags among representatives in the first place.

DeAngelis states he did not advocate the law's passage. Not so. Two representatives told me that at a Democratic caucus in January 1991, DeAngelis helped broker a deal between the bill's supporters and its opponents. True, he did not vote on it. Which only raises another question: If he believed there was no conflict of interest, why did he excuse himself?

A separate piece

To the editors:

In his December 16 letter, David L. Sutton describes his use of sexual terms for inanimate objects while in boot camp. However, calling a gun a "piece" is not a neologism of the U.S. Navy, and it seems unlikely that it originally had a sexual connotation.

The first case in the *Colonial Records of Connecticut* is from "A Corte holden att Newton 26 Apr. 1636" in which "It was now complayned yt Henry Stiles or some of the servants had traded a peece wth the Indians for corne." Mr. Stiles was ordered to retrieve the piece or he would be in trouble with the court. I don't know how one takes back a sexual encounter, although I have known a number of persons who wished they could.

REID R. SAMUELSON
Eastford, Connecticut

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FROM WASHINGTON

Et tu, "Bugsy"?

Oliver Stone is in the doghouse over his movie *JFK*. He stands accused of trashing history in his presentation of the Kennedy assassination; of glorifying a disreputable if not lunatic character in the person of New Orleans prosecutor Jim Garrison; and of polluting the minds of a generation too young to remember the real events. They may draw the lesson that America is controlled by a vast conspiracy in the government and media, of which Lee Harvey Oswald was just a minor player and possibly an innocent dupe.

But the problem goes far beyond Oliver Stone. He is just a minor player, and possibly an innocent dupe, of a conspiracy to twist the truth that includes virtually all of Hollywood if not most artists throughout history. The media, I'm sorry to report, are involved in this conspiracy as well. How else to explain their obsessive critical focus on Oliver Stone and *JFK*, while more dangerous malefactors escape unscathed?

Is it just a coincidence that Oliver Stone is vilified for glamorizing Jim Garrison, while Warren Beatty gets nothing but praise for glamorizing the far more odious figure of mobster Bugsy Siegel? In a mild way, *Bugsy* even uses some of the same verisimilitude-inducing techniques as *JFK*, such as mixing in real footage (a final shot of present-day Las Vegas, which Siegel ostensibly founded in 1946), and telling you what happened to the characters after the movie's story ended.

To be sure, the hero of *Bugsy* kills a couple of people. But who can hold that against such an irresistible charmer and visionary? "He's classically heroic, in a way," explains Beatty's co-star Annette Bening, accurately capturing the movie's viewpoint. "He has a fatal flaw—he has hubris. And fate is unkind." Says Meyer Lansky in the movie itself: "He isn't even interested in money. He's interested in the idea." Sex and ideas: a veritable Gary Hart.

Bugsy, writes *The New York Times* approvingly, is "the archetypal American dreamer." In the movie, standing in the middle of a barren desert, Beatty/Bugsy imagines Las Vegas. "It came to me like a vision, like a religious epiphany," the character says. In fact, according to *Little Man* (Little, Brown), Robert Lacey's recent biography of Meyer Lansky, Siegel didn't even come close to inventing Las Vegas. By the end of World War II there were already two large luxury casino-hotels on the Las Vegas "Strip." A local newspaper reported in 1946 that every rich person who came to town said, "I'm going to build a hotel." Even the Flamingo Hotel itself wasn't Bugsy's idea. He invested in it after construction had started, and later forced out the real founder in the usual unsavory manner.

Bugsy makes much of Siegel's alleged desire to assassinate Mussolini, although even in the movie he never acts on it. This is supposed to give a gloss of patriotism to the hero's murderous instincts. In fact, according to *We Only Kill Each Other* (Pocket Books), a 1967 biography of Siegel by Dean Jennings, Bugsy actually did business with Mussolini. The dictator sent him $40,000 as an advance on delivery of a new kind of explosive in which Siegel—visionary as ever—had invested. Only after the failure of a test explosion—for which Siegel went to Italy, socialized with Mussolini (plus Goebbels and Göring), and notably failed to assassinate him—did relations deteriorate. Now *that* story would have made a great movie.

Clearly, then, Warren Beatty and *The New York Times* are involved in a conspiracy, along with the rest of the entertainment-informational complex, to destroy the American Dream for generations too young to remember where they were the day Bugsy Siegel was shot. By glamorizing bloody criminals, they are poisoning children's minds against real American heroes like Lee Iacocca and Robert Stempel.

But *Bugsy* is not this conspiracy's darkest achievement of late. That encomium belongs to Walt Disney Studios' vicious misrepresentation of *Beauty and the Beast*. This subversively entertaining work of propaganda distorts several key episodes, makes up new characters out of whole cloth, and undermines the psychological structure of the tale.

Psychiatrist Bruno Bettelheim discusses "Beauty and the Beast" at length in his classic book on fairy tales, *The Uses of Enchantment* (Vintage paperback). If I've got this right, the tale is really about the healthy transformation of a child's Oedipal attachment to a parent into romantic love for a more suitable object. When Beauty's love turns the Beast into a handsome prince, "This foreshadows by centuries the Freudian view that sex must be experienced by the child as disgusting as long as his sexual longings are attached to his parent," but when directed at someone else, "sexual longings no longer seem beastly."

So much for Beauty. As for the Beast, his side of the story is about "an evolution from a self-centered, immature (phallic-aggressive-destructive) sexuality to one that finds its fulfillment in a human relation of deep devotion." In short, "The marriage of Beauty and the Beast is the humanization and socialization of the id by the superego."

The Disney people mangle all these subconscious themes in ways that inevitably will cause grave psychological trauma to young viewers. If the transferal of affection from father to lover is disrupted, the long-term effect on our gross national product could be severe.

In the movie, Beauty rejects the equation between handsomeness and virtue from the very beginning, in the person of an invented lothario named Gaston, thus short-circuiting the tale's crucial moral development. In the original story, Beauty asks her father for a rose, symbolizing her Oedipal attachment to him. When he breaks one off its stem to give to her, says Bettelheim, it symbolizes her loss of virginity. In the movie, it is the Beast who possesses a rose, wilting in a glass case for lack of love. Goodness only knows what tender ids will make of that.

In the Beast's house, Beauty can have anything she wants—"a narcissistic fantasy typically engaged in by children." But, "The fairy story tells that such a life, far from being satisfying, soon becomes empty and boring." In the Disney version, though, aesthetic considerations (a brilliant production number called "Be Our Guest") prevent any hint of boredom with material things. Are we thereby guaranteeing future generations of greedheads?

Space limitations prevent full delineation of Hollywood's plot against our nation's future. Clearly *The Addams Family*, with its celebration of dysfunctional parents and children, is part of the conspiracy. I'm not saying that *JFK* was intended to distract us from the real danger. I'm just raising the possibility.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

FEBRUARY 3, 1992

SEX AND THE CANDIDATE

The first voting of the 1992 presidential election is still three weeks away, but several polls and many breathless pundits have already anointed Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton the front-runner. Now begins the phase of the election ritual known as "scrutiny." Political reporters and Clinton's Democratic opponents have already started examining and challenging his proposals, his eleven-year record in Arkansas, and his "character." This process is entirely appropriate, and especially necessary in the case of a candidate largely unknown to people outside his home state.

Inevitably, the so-called character frisk is going to involve a probe into the candidate's sex life. Already, ranking aides to a rival candidate are spreading rumors—utterly unsubstantiated—that Clinton is currently involved with women other than his wife. Hardly a story gets written about Clinton's front-runnerhood without reference to the "persistent rumors" of past extramarital affairs. Clinton has been forced to address the subject in public. He has acknowledged that his marriage had "difficulties" sometime in the past and that "if the standard is perfection, I can't meet it." Clinton and his wife, Hillary, have said publicly that they are committed to each other. Top campaign aides brief reporters to the effect that whatever indiscretions Clinton engaged in, they are now history. Still, Clinton supporters worry that "the personal issue" will explode and scupper their man.

We have, of course, been here before. Gary Hart exploded in 1988 over revelations of continuing philandering. Over a century before, the *Buffalo Evening Telegraph* exposed that, as a young man, Grover Cleveland had fathered a child out of wedlock. Republicans turned the story into a sleazy chant ("Ma, Ma, where's my Pa? Gone to the White House, Ha, ha ha.") That time, Cleveland won. Sometimes candidates dogged in sex scandals are defeated; sometimes they're re-elected. The public's capacity to judge is not automatically shorted out when sexual misconduct is alleged.

The danger today is exacerbated, however, by the immediacy of the media, its capacity to bring instant, intimate access to any candidate's life. The personal is already excessively emphasized. When a scandal breaks, it can take over altogether; and in the delicate tides of a minute-by-minute campaign, it can obscure anything else. And the forces of puritanism in today's republic seem stronger than in the recent past: the old intolerance from the "family values" right has joined forces with the new intolerance of the politically correct left, which sees many private actions—infidelity, promiscuity—as evidence of wider, political injustices.

This is not to say that a politician's private life is never anybody else's business (see "Privates On Parade," TNR, November 13, 1989, and "Predators," August 19 & 26, 1991). John F. Kennedy's affair with Judith Exner clearly was the public's business, since it opened him to mob blackmail. Gary Hart's philandering was a tough case. On balance, it was the public's business because it indicated recklessness and obsessiveness. But the details of a candidate's sex life, unlike his medical or financial history, ought to have a presumption of protection from

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public view. At a time when networks and newspapers are cutting back on coverage, the amount of time and energy devoted to the sex beat should be closely scrutinized.

If a news organization looks into a candidate's personal life, the only criterion for assessment should be relevance to the job. The presidency includes being something of a role model, but in an era when half of all marriages end in divorce and when extramarital activity is common, adultery shouldn't in and of itself disqualify anyone—even if it is on-going. Only if it reflects a compulsive or obsessive personality, is conducted in a way that draws glaring attention to itself, or is undertaken with no regard for discretion or propriety should it be a relevant consideration.

These standards may seem hopelessly optimistic. So we suggest a final rule: the press should not treat the most damaging rumors spread by rivals—Republican or Democrat—as protected by the usual source-reporter relationship. If it's clear that a rival is spreading them with utter disregard for the truth, that candidate ought to be exposed for his actions. The leaks say much about the rumor-spreader's character; they usually say far less about the character of the target. Making the sources of falsehood answer for their own actions would do much to encourage a loftier focus for this year's campaign.

NOTEBOOK

BUSHISM OF THE WEEK: "I think there were some differences, there's no question, and will still be. We're talking about a major, major situation here that requires constant work. But it was well worth it and there's much more to it than just this—I mean just these sixteen accomplishments or whatever. I mean, we've got a major rapport—relationship of economics, major in the security, and all of that, we should not lose sight of." —January 10, to reporters, on his trip to Japan

FIRST THINGS: Those who have looked in vain for any hint of conviction in George Bush's long career need search no further. Traveling in Israel, Senator Phil Gramm said, "I've known George Bush for twenty-five years and there is no subject he feels more adamant about than settlements." Not the domestic economy, not the trade deficit, not education or the environment, not crime or furloughs or the Pledge of Allegiance, but Israeli settlements on the West Bank.

BATTLE OF ALGIERS, CONT'D: Our doubts, expressed in last week's issue, that the old Algerian regime would permit the Muslim fundamentalists to come to power took a week to become facts. No, there would not be a second round at the ballot (originally scheduled for this week); and the prior results at the polls in mid-December would be discreetly forgotten. "We need time," the military explained, "to prepare the society for true democratic practices." Unfortunately, time has already run out. The revolutionary Arab republics—Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Algeria itself—are, if anything, more frightened of popular fundamentalism than the monarchies and emirates that they taunt. And the Islamic Salvationists' commitment to democracy extends to the one election that puts government in their hands. The State Department is thereby reduced to an embarrassed hedge, committed to "democracy" but leery of what, in this part of the world, democracy will mean. Meanwhile, the crowds in Algiers cheer the army, clinging to those who will defend what goes precariously for modern life in Algeria: the right to see a movie, and a much more important right, when you are continuously assaulted by propaganda, the right to have a drink.

FILING LINE:

Files of East German Secret Police Are Opened but Few Seek Access

—*The New York Times*, January 3

Germans rush to see Big Brother's files

—*The Chicago Tribune*, same day

(thanks to Alexander Hehmeyer, Chicago, Illinois)

Bush's favorite drug pusher.

ASSAD CASE

By Michael Widlanski

Both the United States and Israel learned in the 1980s that Lebanon is an explosive, anarchic amalgam of armed militias and religious intolerance. While trying to enforce a truce, 241 U.S. Marines were killed by a car bomb apparently planted with the help of Syria. Similarly, Israel's army, after a relatively easy triumph over PLO and Syrian forces, pulled back from Lebanon, under the pressure of Syrian-supported car bombs and ambushes by radical Shiite forces. Syria, on the other hand, remains firmly entrenched in Lebanon, today occupying 75 percent of Lebanese territory.

Why is Syria so attached to Lebanon? And how can

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Syria achieve control where both Israel and the United States could not? The answer is drugs. Like Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad is a military commander who has tied his government to the lucrative drug trade. But there the comparison ends. George Bush went after Noriega, a corrupt little man who got too big for his britches, fighting a war, taking him prisoner, and putting him on trial. Bush seems to have no desire to challenge Assad, an ascetic, careful leader who uses drugs as an instrument of policy to raise much needed foreign currency for his ailing economy and keep the reins on rival militias in Lebanon.

Between 20 percent and 35 percent of the heroin imported into the United States comes from Syrian-occupied Lebanon. The red-tipped poppy plants flourish in the rich effluvial soil of the Bekaa Valley, which, nestled between two mountain ranges, has been turned into one huge drug hothouse. The Drug Enforcement Administration estimated in 1989 that the value of the Lebanese drug trade was between $700 million and $1 billion—$500 million of which went into Syrian hands. This year, several independent estimates rate the value of the Syrian-Lebanese drug trade at more than $4 billion a year. This may be more than half of Lebanon's total GNP.

When the Syrians first moved into Lebanon in 1975, in the guise of the "Arab Peace Keeping Force" and supposedly to enforce a truce in the Lebanese civil war, Lebanon produced only about 100 tons of hashish per year. By 1985 hashish production had increased twenty-fold, to 2,000 tons a year, as more agricultural areas were put under drug cultivation. In 1986 Lebanese hashish accounted for 75 percent of world production. But the Syrians figured out a better way to utilize the land mass of a country smaller than Massachusetts. They imported Turkish and Iranian experts to help gradually transform the drug fields from hashish to opium, which reaps more than ten times the price of hashish per acre. These experts also encouraged crop rotation, which allows two or more drug harvests per year. Ten percent of the Bekaa Valley was under drug cultivation ten years ago. An estimated 90 percent is today.

The Syrians have added a cocaine dimension to their drug business as well. Using Lebanese émigré families in South America, they import coca base, refine it, and then transship it to Europe and the United States. It is no accident that the main U.S. port of entry for Syrian-Lebanese drug products is Detroit, where there are also many Syrian-Lebanese families. Syria tried early last year to coax the American-based Baxter chemical company to build a "pharmaceutical factory." But press reports that reminded American readers how the Libyans and Iraqis used their "pharmaceutical industries" for chemical and biological warfare torpedoed the deal. In the Syrian case the "dual use" possibilities may quite well have included drug processing as well as chemical and biological warfare.

The United States has done nothing to hinder this amazing growth industry. Syrian expansion throughout Lebanon had been proceeding fitfully through the 1980s, but in October 1990 Syria made its big final push. When the Syrian leader sent several thousand soldiers to "fight" in the Gulf war, President George Bush and Secretary of State James Baker decided to overlook the Syrian de facto annexation of Lebanon, including the massacre of 700 Christian militiamen. They also decided to overlook Syria's drug dealing. The language of a recent State Department narcotics report is breathtakingly naive: "Many [Syrian] officials are committed to implementing stated government policies against illegal practices. U.S. officials believe that individual Syrian soldiers and other officials stationed in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, as well as some higher level military officials, are involved in the drug trade. This is in contradiction to the stated Syrian government policy and such individuals are subject to prosecution if the government is presented with evidence against them."

President Bush's National Drug Control Strategy report to Congress of February 1991 talks a lot about Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia, but there is no mention of Syria. But the United States does more than overlook Syrian drug running. It actually invited Syrian army officers—and these are the drug pushers—on an intimate guided tour of U.S. drug war installations. In May and June 1991, General Ali Darbuli and General Hassan al-Huri took a month-long trek through the secret corridors of DEA facilities in New York, Detroit, El Paso, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Seattle. The administration's penchant for sharing sensitive intelligence with Syria is nothing new: more than a year ago Baker naively "confronted" Assad with top secret intelligence data on Syrian terrorist operations—thereby sentencing to death two undercover Israeli agents to whom the intelligence was traced.

Assad has collected American aid dollars for the "destruction" of drug crops—rumors put the amount as high as $400 million per year—while actually increasing the number of acres farmed for drugs. (The DEA acknowledges it has given money to Syria and says that it is not satisfied with the result, but details are classified.) Syrians occasionally make well-publicized "confiscations" or "burnings" of drug fields, but these are usually the cheaper hashish fields—and only a fraction thereof. Senior Syrian officers get their own cut of the drug take by collecting "taxes" on crop yields, selling "port permits," issuing limited travel permits to drug dealers at a cost of $10,000 a pop, and granting cross-country multi use permits for over $100,000. The United States and Israel have samples of travel permits—signed by top Syrian officials—allowing traffickers to move in and out of Lebanon and Syria without being searched or having merchandise confiscated.

Several of the permits bear the signature of Mustafa Tlass, Syria's minister of defense. Signed permits, video footage, photographs, and bank transactions incriminate Assad's own brother Rifaat and his two sons, Firaas and Dariid. Other evidence incriminates Ghazi Kenaan, head of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon, Ali Duba, Syrian army intelligence chief, and Ali D'obali, President Assad's personal administrative assistant. Tlass report-

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edly gets an annual "salary bonus" of one gold bar, thanks to his drug activities. But according to Israeli intelligence, even the lowliest Syrian army private gets salary increments directly tied to the drug trade. This, together with the age-old Lebanese black market in everything from lingerie to refrigerators, helps explain why Syrian soldiers love to be assigned to Lebanon.

George Bush asserted last year that "the international drug trade is a threat to our national security and the security and stability of other nations." In Syria's case, it seems, he's willing to make an exception.

MICHAEL WIDLANSKI is a former Middle East correspondent of the Cox Newspapers.

My Russian ancestor.

UNCLE BORIS

By Walter Laqueur

When I was a young boy my father once told me that an ancestor had gone to Russia and became the physician of the empress. What empress? He did not know. My interest then was not great; the information was stored away somewhere in my memory. In 1979 I was given a book for review by TNR titled *A Russian Looks at America.* It had been written in 1857 and 1858, and the University of Chicago Press had just brought out the first English edition. It was one of the first systematic descriptions of the United States by a Russian traveler. He saw, as Henry Steele Commager wrote in his preface, almost everything that was to be seen, interviewed a great many people, including the president of Harvard, and while not a thinker of the stature of Tocqueville, saw on occasion (again to quote Commager) further than the French count, and looked with greater confidence to America's future.

The name of the author was Alexander Borisovich Lakier (1825-1870), and mindful of what my father had told me I called the review "Travels with my uncle." A gentleman with an aristocratic Greek name took exception: I was told that the distinguished Russian traveler had married into his family, and was of French origin. According to a biographical dictionary of the Russian nobility, Alexander Lakier's grandfather had been a judge somewhere in Central France, at Clermont-Ferrand or St.-Etienne.

This seemed to be conclusive negative evidence except for some minor points that seemed suspicious: Alexander had a brother named Wilhelm, and what self-respecting Frenchman would give his son a Teutonic name? Furthermore I had been in touch with the editors of the German National Biography, who told me that there had been a medical doctor named Moritz Laqueur born in Carlsruhe, Silesia, in 1787, who died in Moscow in 1850. This was interesting: if someone named Moritz were to settle in Russia he might well change his name to Boris, which was the name of the traveler's father. Furthermore, my family hailed from the immediate vicinity of Carlsruhe.

Owing to the researches of Alexander Lakier's American editors I knew that Alexander's father had indeed been a doctor, the head of the quarantine station in Taganrog, on the Sea of Azov. This city was a backwater by any standard, but in the year 1827 Czar Alexander I traveled in Southern Russia, fell ill, and died in Taganrog. The traveler's father was among the medical men who signed the death certificate. A short time after he was ennobled for his services, but the death certificate became one of the most disputed documents in Russian history. According to widespread belief the czar had not died at all but simply disappeared to spend the rest of his days as a hermit in the Urals.

I knew some other facts about Alexander Lakier. His mother's name was Schaufuss, a scion of the Baltic German nobility. He had been a very promising young man, equally interested in the law, history, and literature. His first wife was the daughter of P.A. Pletnev, the rector of St. Petersburg university and one of the central intellectual figures of his time, friend of Pushkin, Gogol, and many others, editor of the leading literary magazine of the day. Alexander later became a member of the state committee initiating the liberation of the serfs. But at 28, tragedy struck: his wife died in childbirth. Alexander, grief stricken, set out on a series of long journeys, first to America, then to Europe, North Africa, and the Near East, also visiting Jerusalem.

All this information was interesting, but it did not tell me whether Lakier had been an ancestor of mine. In the 1980s I did some research on the history of my family. But genealogical studies by foreign visitors were not encouraged in Brezhnev's Russia, or under Andropov. Then last year, quite suddenly, there was an Alexander Lakier renaissance in Moscow. He had been the first to write a study of Russian heraldry, which became a standard work. In 1990 it was republished in 100,000 copies. The editor of the book, Dr. Soboleva, had access to all the files I had looked for in vain. There was a longish biographical essay, according to which Lakier, while politically a liberal, had also been a bit of a Slavophile. But the editor was strangely silent on the subject of his antecedents. I tried to obtain some information from her, but there was no answer. Then last summer *Voprosy Istorii,* the leading Soviet (Russian) historical journal, published an essay by Dr. Soboleva on the "Father of Russian Heraldry." She had been to Taganrog and had consulted the church register, which miraculously had survived the shelling of both the Crimean and Second World Wars.

The following story emerged: Dr. Boris (formerly Moritz) had arrived in Russia in 1816. He had been a

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Prussian subject, who had studied medicine (and obstetrics and rhetoric) at the University of Berlin. His parents had been poor people and he had been married before. His first wife's name was Lea, his son's, Sigmund. But it had been a religious wedding and thus invalid in Russia. Deserting his wife and child was no gentlemanly behavior, but he was legally within his rights to call his marriage to the Baltic lady (Alexander's mother) his first.

What happened to his first wife and child? Boris had a brother, named David, who, unlike him, did not convert. He was, in fact, the rabbi of Staedtel, a village close to Carlsruhe, at that time one of the most populous—and poorest—Jewish communities in Silesia. It was David who took care of the deserted wife and son. But David was as poor as his community, which could afford to pay him only a few thaler a month. He was under constant pressure from his family to look for a job elsewhere or another profession. He refused, arguing that the community would never find another spiritual leader for his salary.

At this juncture an unlikely helper appeared on the scene, Eugen, Duke of Wurttemberg, the proprietor of most of the lands around Staedtel and Carlsruhe, where he built an impressive castle. Eugen was also a general and an intellectual, a humanist philosopher who also composed operas and had fought in the Napoleonic wars. He had several passions in his life; one was playing chess, and it so happened that Reb David was the only chess player of some accomplishment in the neighborhood. At least once a week a messenger would call and request David's presence at the castle. The two became friends during the long evenings of chess. Frequently they were joined by a composer staying at the castle by the name of Carl Maria von Weber. Sometimes David would listen to Weber and the Duke making music, sometimes Weber would watch David and the Duke playing chess. David was a legendary figure. One of his successors intended to write his biography but died before he could make any progress.

Back to Alexander Borisovich in Moscow and Taganrog, where he spent the last years of his life, having married into a very wealthy Venetian-Greek family there. He died relatively young, devoting his last years to administering the family estates and engaging in philanthropic activities. Alexander had two brothers: Nikolai, who married into the Tolstoy family and became a country squire, and Wilhelm, who changed his name to Vasilii, joined the civil service, and ended his career as deputy governor of Western Siberia. Further research will be needed to find out more about them and their descendants, my great uncles twice removed.

Being related to Russian nobility has not so far made a significant change in my life, and the impact has been even less on my children and grandchildren. I have not yet decided whether to participate at the next annual gathering of the Tolstoy clan at Yasnaya Polyana. But I do find some satisfaction in the realization that my family relationship seems to be closer to one of my literary idols than that of Vladimir Kyrillovich (the present pretender to the throne of Russia) to the last czar.

WALTER LAQUEUR is chairman of the International Research Council of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Nutcakes and the New World Order.

BO KNOWS NWO

By Alex Heard

When President Bush started giving the term "New World Order" rapid rotation back in 1990, he probably thought of it as little more than sparkling phrasemaking in the tradition of "Points of Light" and "Who is this chickenshit?" (his reaction to Senator Paul Wellstone's criticism of his policies in the Gulf). Since then, however, although the administration has pretty much retired the slogan, it has achieved an intense life of its own on the margins of the American political scene.

For fringe buffs, NWO has stirred up more theoretical action than anything since Gorby's head splotch. Among such people, it instantly brings to mind the Bavarian Illuminati, the Freemasons, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Trilateral Commission, Nazis, One World Government, the Book of Revelation, and the weird eyeball-in-the-pyramid arrangement on the back of dollar bills, under which perch the words "Novus Ordo Seclorum," or New Order of the Ages.

With the agitation so frenzied, there's a chance for that rarest of events: when far righties and lefties, set in motion by similar fears, accidentally run into one another on a small patch of turf far removed from day-to-day experience. The phenomenon might be called the "K Bump," in honor of Henry Kissinger, loathing of whom tenuously linked left- and right-wing extremists in the '70s. There's no chance, of course, of much further linkage, because the sides that "come together" despise each other on every other conceivable level. Take K himself. Lefties considered him a menace because of his war criminal status, righties because they saw him as a Trilateral stooge. When partisans from both sides glanced up to see who else was in a boxer's clinch with the Antichrist, they were equally revulsed by the dilated eyes that met their own.

Nonetheless, K Bumps are fascinating, and it is easy to see why NWO has tremendous potential for producing them: the very words give off mistings of Orwellian nightsweat. Groups as divergent as Christians and Christics churn out reams of copy on what NWO portends.

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Among the kibbitzers:

•Eustace Mullins, a far-right conspiracy theorist based in Staunton, Virginia, whose 1985 book *The World Order: A Study in the Hegemony of Parasitism* explains that a grand cabal of international bankers has been yanking global strings since the World Congress of Vienna in 1815. (Mullins got his start by visiting Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington and writing down Pound's ideas about the Federal Reserve's evils.) In this scenario, Bush is merely part of a "third-tier dynastic family" serving the top echelons of nationalism- and religion-hating bankers whose interests are served by One Worldism. This "Black Nobility" consists of the British Royal Family, the Rothschilds, Rockefellers, Morgans, and other international super-bigs. OK. But why was Handmaiden George allowed to utter a phrase the B.N. probably wanted to remain secret? "I don't know," Mullins admits. "I was very surprised when Bush went public with it last year. All I know is it put me in a bind. I got swamped with orders for my book. I ran out. Now I have back orders for 2,500 copies."

•Tom Valentine, a right-of-center, nationally syndicated talk-radio host in St. Paul. Valentine says that a shadowy group he dubbed "The Immaculate They" is running Bush's NWO. Who are They? "I wish I knew," he says. "But it's not the Rockefellers and all those people. If your name's in the paper, there's no way you're one of the 'They.'"

•Dr. Bob Hieronimus, a left-of-center, nationally syndicated talk-radio host in Baltimore. Hieronimus earned his Ph.D. with a dissertation on the reverse side of the Great Seal of the United States (the pyramid-and-eye arrangement). His formidable task is to combat misuse of the term "Novus Ordo Seclorum" by the Bushoids. To him, NOS is sacred civic wording that refers simply to American-style democracy as the Founders framed it. He argues that Bush is "rewriting our mottos" to lend false support to a rightie One World Government scheme.

•The hanging-tough staff of the Marxist *Revolutionary Worker*, who work NWO into a headline each week. For them, the phrase symbolizes old-tyme bully-nation imperialism that, post-Soviet bloc, will overrun a defenseless world. A December 1991 article, "The New World Order and the Pan Am 103 Scam," explains that the United States framed Libya in that bombing and may soon use this as a pretext for Libya's "military destruction."

•The editor of the Southern National Newsletter, a Memphis publication that crusades for restoration of the Confederacy. SNN's policy stance may surprise you. Think it would be all for a war against dusky Iraqi hordes? Guess again. SNN joined Pat Buchanan in dissent, sizing up Bush's "so-called New World Order" as an excuse for yet another "Yankee land grab."

•The Christic Institute. Danny Sheehan, CI's chief man in Washington, has written position papers that argue that Bush's stated definition of NWO (U.N.-approved multilateral action) was a screen for SOAMU (same old American military unilateralism). Fairly mainstream thoughts, but Sheehan earns a mention for his belief that what is really afoot is a return to a sort of white-people-are-tops realignment that he says was first mapped out prior to World War I. "There were discussions going on as to how czarist Russians, England, the U.S., and Germany were going to divide up the world," he says. Now, a new version of this is being studied, a "monolithic northern industrial power"—made up of us, a German-dominated EC, and the Russian republics—"that would basically subjugate aboriginal peoples of the world.... So it's a very *old* world order they're talking about."

•Pat Robertson, who explains the various and complex ways NWO squares with apocalyptic visions in the Bible in two recent books, 1990's *The New Millennium* and 1991's *The New World Order*. The startling twist here is that the biblical tea leaves indicate very bad times ahead not for Iraq, but for Israel. "Saddam Hussein has set the machinery in motion which one day will bring the military force of world government against Israel," Robertson wrote in *The New Millennium*. But he hopes it won't happen. "We must ensure that the trend throughout the 1990s remains in favor of a Jewish homeland in Israel," he writes, then soothingly adds, "and not for the elimination of the Jews."

•New Agers. Some, Robertson-like, see signs of Apocalypse in NWO, but prefer to place the Bible on a level playing field with other prophetic sources—such as Nostradamus and 10,000-year-old Indian prophecies. Matthew Stenger, a New Age lecturer based in North Carolina, tells audiences that the Hopis predicted "a Third Great Shaking" (following World Wars I and II), which will occur soon after "the mark of the bear appears on all goods men buy or sell." According to Stenger, the Universal Price Code, which resembles "bear scratches on tree bark," fits the prophecy.

•James "Bo" Gritz, a Populist Party candidate for president who believes that NWO is a One World Government scheme with a Revelation subtext. Bush had three objectives in his Kuwait adventure: to validate the United Nations as a governing body that supersedes our Constitution, to establish the U.S. as an international police squad, and to "accelerate America's financial demise in preparation for the 'New World Order.'" Gritz believes the EC is an early stage in a coming "cashless credit debit system" with spooky ramifications. In the future, we will all be marked on the forehead and hands with "laser tattooing" that can be read by machines when we buy something—a sort of UPC discount stamp.

Searching the list for K Bumps, one finds several, along with the built-in barriers to further cooperation predicted by the original model. *The Revolutionary Worker* and Southern National Newsletters might agree on Yankee imperialism's evils but might get unstuck over OSHA. Mullins and the Christics share themes, but Eustace might fidget terribly at one of the Institute's famous five-hour fund-raising concerts featuring David Crosby.

Gritz, Robertson, and the ecumenical New Ager

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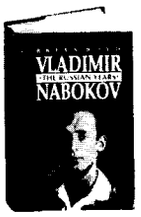

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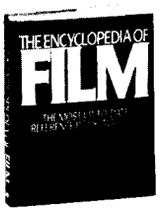

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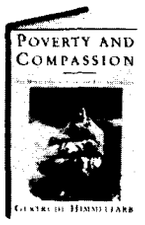

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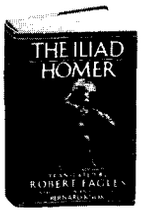

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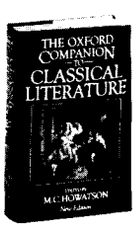

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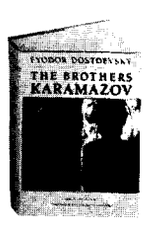

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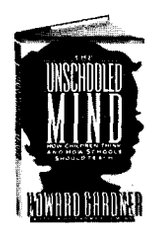

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Stenger agree on the apocalypse but they'd fight about everything else. Robertson is "for" Jews. Gritz is a fan of *The Spotlight.* Stenger's New Age ideas are often vilified by Pat. And Bo's defining characteristic is his status as "the Most Decorated Green Beret" and "the Real Life Rambo." This sort of thing grates on New Age sensibilities. Imagine the scattering effect of Gritz crashing a New Age gathering—all burbling music, soft edges—and yelling, as he did in a recent interview with *The Spotlight*: "I'm harder than woodpecker lips." The Big Tent would collapse in the ensuing stampede for the exits.

ALEX HEARD is a frequent contributor to TNR.

Why are books so expensive?

READER RIP-OFF

By Tony Rothman

About a decade ago, while I was living in Oxford, banks began installing automatic cash machines, the type now found on every street-corner. But the first of these were placed in the bank lobbies themselves. Anyone familiar with English banking hours will realize at once that such a strategy rendered the machines essentially worthless. Some machines eventually were installed outdoors, but they shut down at 9 p.m. daily and completely on Sundays, on the theory that computers must observe the Sabbath. It was a classic case of a technological society that didn't know how to use technology.

In the United States, nothing reminds me so much of this syndrome as the book publishing industry. As a scientifically inclined writer who's frequently been forced to enter the labyrinths of publishing, I've often asked editors the sorts of questions you might expect from one of my background: Why has the cost of books nearly tripled in the past fifteen years when the cost of electronics is going down? Why, when most authors have their books on disk, do large publishers refuse to accept them? And why, when direct-from-disk typesetting is available, are manuscripts sent to Hong Kong for typesetting? My questions are not meant to be annoying. Like any consumer, I wince at having to shell out $50 for a textbook that has gone through twelve editions, and like any writer, I rail at the gods when during the year or two it takes to produce a book, the publisher is sold, my editor vanishes, and my immortal work is shunted to the oblivion file.

The replies I get are fairly uniform, and none of them makes any sense. The price of paper has skyrocketed, I'm told. Not all disks are compatible with the company's computer system. It's difficult to keep track of corrections on disk. It's cheaper to send a manuscript to Hong Kong for typesetting than to do it electronically onshore.

The answers might get closer to sanity if those who gave them took a walk to their local book manufacturing plant. (A large distance, to be sure; these days printing plants are no longer owned by the publishers whose work they turn out.) Take the point about increasing paper costs. At one medium-sized printing plant I know, the production costs of a book—which include printing, binding, and typesetting—are a little over $9,000 for 2,000 copies of a 320-page book. Of this, about 15 percent is for paper. The American Paper Institute can't seem to say how much the cost of paper has increased over the last decade, so let's assume the price has risen by a factor of five. If all other things are held constant, the production costs should have increased by only 13 percent. If these costs are passed on directly to the consumer, the cover price should have risen by the same amount. Yet cover prices have tripled.

Disk compatibility is no longer a serious dilemma: most word processors can produce ASCII files, which can be read by almost all systems. Indeed, many smaller publishers work from authors' disks. As for editorial corrections, this is clearly not a problem of technology but of bookkeeping. The usual solution is to assign a keeper of corrections.

Hong Kong typesetting is a murkier dilemma, and people involved in book production seem to disagree over whether offshore typesetting represents substantial savings. But the disagreement itself is instructive—if savings were substantial, probably everyone would know it. Nevertheless, offshore typesetting represents a good example of the self-defeating use of technology. An error-free disk is produced by an author or editor. It is not used. Instead the manuscript is sent to Asia, where it is typeset by an operator who does not read English. An inordinate amount of time and money is spent finding and correcting the errors introduced by the typesetter.

What is the alternative? Join, for a moment, in a thought experiment and see if it's possible to reduce the cover price of books by a factor of three while providing a product that's as convenient as a book, as easy to read—and as legal. And all using existing technology. Start by breaking down the cost of a book. A typical discount schedule is roughly as follows: if the cover price of a book is $24, then at least 40 percent, or $8, will go to the retailer. Of the remaining $12, perhaps $3 will go to the distributors who ship the books from the printers to the bookstores. Of the remaining $9, it might cost $3 actually to produce the book. The author receives $2 and the publisher keeps $4. All these numbers vary considerably, but as a rule of thumb a book's cover price is six to eight times the production cost.

Like pantyhose and toy cars, books are priced by the manufacturer. That is, the publisher fixes the cover price and gives retailers a discount. Tradition seems the

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only reason for such a practice. Switching to mark-up pricing would undoubtedly stimulate competition and lower the cost of books. In the above example, if the distributor took a 30 percent mark-up on the book as it came from the publisher ($9) and the retailer took 50 percent on that, the cover price would be $18.

The next tactic is to cut production costs. Unfortunately, these costs are only a small percentage of the cover price; using authors' disks for typesetting is not going to do the trick. Indeed, at a medium-sized publisher, typesetting represents only some 10 percent of the production costs for a 20,000-copy run and less than 2 percent of the cover price (for longer mass-market press runs the percentage is even lower). Obviously one could do better by eliminating retailers and distributors. This is the principle behind mail order. A $20 book can often be sold in this way for $12, a substantial saving but still not the stated goal.

Searching for more radical strategies, one's eyes invariably alight on the CD-ROM—actually storing read-only text on a compact disc in much the same way that we now store music. The attraction is easy to see: *War and Peace* in three languages could be put on a CD the size of a fingernail. Even now, there is nothing to prevent Sony from producing portable electronic "books" capable of reading tiny CDs. How much would such a system cost? Apart from the electronic book itself, which might cost several hundred dollars, CDs are cheap to produce—only about 60 cents for a full-sized audio CD. Giving the author $2, the publisher $4, with the same mark-ups for distributor and retailer as before, yields $12.87 for the cover price. Going to mail order yields $6.60 plus postage. Nevertheless, nobody likes to read CD-ROMS. Computer displays are hard on the eye, and no electronic retrieval system yet devised is as convenient as an ordinary book.

So go one step further. What if we placed a small printing plant right in the bookstore and electronically shipped a book direct from the publisher? In other words, a customer browses in a store where one copy of each book is on display, along the lines of most video stores, then having made a choice, has the book printed on the spot. Such a system would be of little comfort to Rizzoli, but it could handle unillustrated books, which are the majority.

A print-on-demand system has numerous advantages. It effectively eliminates distribution costs. It also eliminates book returns. Roughly 40 percent of all books printed are never sold. By abolishing both returns and distribution costs, the $20 book could be sold for about $10.50. At the same time the retailer's rent goes down since shelf space is saved and the concept of "out of print" disappears; any book on a publisher's master disk is always in print. Books can also be printed from libraries. All this scheme requires is a letter-quality printer that can print and bind a book in about a minute—so as not to wear out the customer's patience—at 1.5 cents a page. Such machines are almost available.

Print on demand is not really a radical idea. Eastman Kodak and McGraw Hill have introduced a pilot program in which a professor, rather than have students buy an entire textbook at an unaffordable price, can order only that part of the book the class will use. About a year ago, only one accounting text was available, but McGraw-Hill is contemplating large-scale electronic publishing.

I find print on demand an aesthetically pleasing idea, but the next step is even more delightful: eliminate publishers altogether. Books could be printed on demand directly from authors' home computers. A central on-line clearinghouse might provide catalogs and advertisements for a small fee. Then the cover price is roughly the author's royalty plus printing plus the retailer's mark-up, which could amount to $7.50.

We have not quite reached the factor of three reduction that I attempted at the outset, and this shows that the puzzle is not a trivial one. The next step of eliminating authors is tempting, since everyone—especially in the book industry—knows that books are an anachronism. Nevertheless, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that publishers begin putting their backlists on disk (scanners are available) and that the industry agree on formats and protocols for network publishing. Even those of us who show unreasonable nostalgia for an activity designed for the nineteenth-century should not be afraid to make it compatible with the twenty-first.

TONY ROTHMAN currently teaches at Harvard University. His latest book is *A Physicist on Madison Avenue* (Princeton University Press).

BERKELEY POSTCARD

LENIN TO GO

By Ann Cooper

When Muscovites were debating what to do with Lenin's mummified corpse this fall, Berkeley writer Martin Schiffenbauer suggested the Soviet founding father could rest in peace here, in People's Park. Schiffenbauer was just kidding, but the mythology of the People's Republic of Berkeley is so powerful that a gullible *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter phoned up for details on the Lenin relocation campaign.

It's easy to see why the Berkeley stereotypes endure. At Revolution Books—where the walls proclaim, "Mao More Than Ever!"—Moscow's August putsch is blithely explained as a battle between exploitative bourgeois cliques, none representing true communism. "Our

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position is that what they had in the Soviet Union was capitalism, in the guise of communism," a salesman told me. "Real communism" has still never had a fair test.

I dropped by Revolution Books a few weeks after moving here from Moscow, where I spent nearly five years reporting on the collapse of the world's grandest experiment in Marxism. Three bookstore workers lounged behind the counter, customerless, conducting an obscure and lonely Marxist debate. The truth is, there probably aren't that many true believers in Berkeley, either. It has, after all, been a long time since the 1960s romance with revolution, when the university gave course credits for cutting sugar cane with the Cuban proletariat.

That's not to say that Berkeley has abandoned quaint causes and left-wing politics. Every phone booth and utility pole in town is a bulletin board for quintessentially Berkeley campaigns: food drives to benefit pets of the homeless, or rallies to protest the new volleyball courts in People's Park. (These are seen as part of a university gentrification plot to squeeze the homeless out of their local sanctuary.) When no one's looking, I steal the most bizarre of the fliers as cultural souvenirs. I have a Columbus Day broadside that reads like a show trial indictment, accusing the Italian explorer of "grand theft; genocide; racism; initiating the destruction of culture; rape, torture and maiming of indigenous people; and instigator of the Big Lie." (Recently city officials followed suit by declaring October 12 Indigenous Peoples Day.)

Another leaflet denounces California's junior senator, John Seymour, as "an enemy of the people," a phrase straight out of Stalin's dictionary of terror, for supporting U.S. aid to El Salvador. "Seymour = Death," the leaflet declares. At least in bourgeois Moscow the slogan-makers have a sense of humor. Even in the darkest moments of the August coup, some brave Muscovite waved a poster proclaiming "Nightmare on Yazov Street," a boisterous poke at putschist Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov.

My husband and I marvel at the wonders of the local service economy, providing Berkeley consumers with home delivery of everything from pizza to videos to cookies and milk or Ben and Jerry's ice cream. We pay almost daily visits to gawk at the produce section of Andronico's, a supermarket so magnificent that we imagine even our friends in Washington would be dazzled, never mind our friends in Moscow.

Some complain that hedonistic consumerism is replacing ideological commitment in Berkeley, that Andronico's shoppers are too busy experimenting with lemon grass and sun-dried tomatoes to march for the causes that gave Berkeley its enduring reputation for flaky compassion. But around my neighborhood, in Gourmet Ghetto, Chez Panisse and other purveyors of the new hedonism think you can have your tart tatin and eat it in good social conscience. When you buy brioche or chevre logs at the trendy Cheese Board, for example, you are supporting one of the city's (maybe one of the world's) few successful experiments in true labor equality. The business is run by a worker collective. Each member draws the same $13 an hour salary. Each has an equal vote in business decisions—and in selecting which political groups can use the front window to promote their causes. The Cheese Board is the kind of worker-run business that was supposed to become the backbone of the Communist economy, but didn't. Now that communism is overthrown, I wondered whether Soviet visitors here might be intrigued to see a genuine, thriving worker's collective. Apparently they're not. "Capitalist business is what they're interested in," says Enid Schreibman, who recruits Soviet businessmen to come to the Bay Area for business training. "They are interested in making a lot of money quickly and learning how we did it." To would-be capitalists, the Cheese Board is just another Berkeley eccentricity.

Coming home from a Moscow assignment inevitably induces a case of the cultural bends, as one becomes reacquainted with the bounty of American life and the efficiency and politeness that grease the gears of commerce here. Even more than our wealth, our Russian friends would be dumbfounded by the ease with which life is conducted here. Our first morning in Berkeley we secured telephone service, opened a bank account, subscribed to a newspaper, bought a computer, and filled our refrigerator—all before lunchtime. Comparable tasks in Moscow, even for Westerners brandishing hard currency, take weeks and involve numerous maddening encounters with insolent or indifferent workers. And no Moscow bank caters to clients on roller skates. The casual availability of technology here is mind boggling. In Moscow the fax was the precious device that allowed Boris Yeltsin to disseminate his defiant decrees during the coup. In Berkeley you use it to send a lunch order to the local deli.

I have mastered the new political vocabulary that developed in my absence—hate crimes, domestic partners, African Americans, co-dependency—but I still struggle to suppress a smirk at some of the issues on the local political agenda. In San Leandro the hot topic is banning gas-powered leaf blowers. In Marin County it's segregating perfume-wearers in public places. I wonder how many decades it will be before my friends in Moscow are disturbed by the racket from a neighbor's leaf blower.

I was browsing in the vast and variegated apple section of Andronico's the other day when a local TV reporter stopped me to ask how I felt about the store's pesticide monitoring program. I was stumped. I confessed I had no opinion about residues and hadn't even thought about pesticide content the whole time I was in Moscow. Still, I am glad that in politically correct America, we have the luxury of worrying about the safety of what we consume. In bourgeois Moscow, alas, *anything* to consume would be a relief.

ANN COOPER covered the Soviet Union for National Public Radio until October 1991.

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Middle-class Medicaid.

GOLDEN GIRLS

By Andrew Bates

With the dramatic surge in the elderly population during the past couple of decades, it's not surprising that there's now a cottage industry of attorneys and financial planners specializing in "elder law." Sounds pretty innocuous, as does the specialty called "Medicaid estate planning." What this really means, however, is helping middle- and upper-income seniors shelter their assets—no matter how great—so they can qualify for Medicaid coverage. It's a practice—and a perfectly legal one—that puts extra pressure on the already financially strapped Medicaid program by squandering precious resources on those who should not have taxpayers financing their care.

Because Medicare covers only the cost of short-term, acute care, paying for long-term care has always been a problem for the elderly. But until the recent explosion of medical costs, old folks were typically able to pick up their own tabs, with the help of their children. In the past decade, however, the cost for nursing home care has soared; it now averages between $25,000 and $30,000 a year. The pressure for loopholes has thus intensified. More and more elderly patients are taking advantage of flaws in the Social Security Act, which enable them to avail themselves of government-subsidized care *and* save their assets for their heirs.

Several recent studies suggest that only 10 percent to 25 percent of nursing home patients have impoverished themselves on medical bills ("spent down," in health care vernacular) to qualify for Medicaid. Even these relatively low figures, which are based on the numbers of patients who start as private pay and end up on Medicaid, overestimate the extent of "spend down" by failing to account for the artificial "impoverishment" that's occurring.

The lawyers who exploit Medicaid loopholes are neither obscure nor shady. The American Bar Association sponsors seminars about where the loopholes are and how to exploit them. Senior citizens can even get advice on Medicaid estate planning from many state Medicaid offices. Boston attorney Harley Gordon, whose *How to Protect Your Life Savings from Catastrophic Illness and Nursing Homes* has sold over 200,000 copies and landed him appearances on talk shows throughout the country, is at least blunt about his agenda: "Every city in America has

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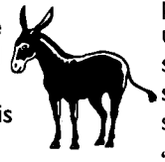

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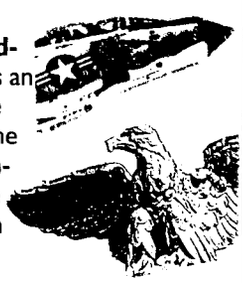

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thousands of lawyers whose job it is to help wealthy people and corporations avoid as much tax as legally possible. What I do is the same thing. Only I help the little people." "Little people" in Gordon's mind means the same as in Leona Helmsley's: the typical recipient of his and others' advice are individuals with between $100,000 and $400,000 in liquid assets.

How does Medicaid planning work? In most states, a single individual cannot qualify for Medicaid until her "countable assets" have been reduced to about $2,000. (For married couples, the rules are more lenient: depending on the state, the spouse can keep anywhere from about $13,000 to $66,000 in assets and from $1,000 to $1,600 a month for personal maintenance needs.) Since virtually all cash and securities have to go to pay nursing home bills, the theory is to convert "countable" liquid assets into exempt assets. The largest shelter in Medicaid estate planning is your home, so elder gurus advise you to pay off your mortgage, remodel your kitchen, or build on. If you don't own a home, buy one.

To spend the rest of your disposable income, pay off your debts, buy a car (the more expensive the better, of course, since it's all exempt), or, in most states, buy personal property—clothing, furniture, jewelry—of any value. Take a vacation. Or, as financial planners Ira Schneider and Ezra Huber advise in *Financial Planning for Long-Term Care*, "An applicant could spend all of his or her assets on something 'frivolous,' such as a ninetieth birthday celebration of Ziegfield Follies proportion."

Not surprising, Medicaid officials say that Medicaid planning is being driven not by the elderly, but by heirs desperate to preserve their inheritance. In doing so, heirs face an ethical dilemma, since Medicaid recipients have more trouble getting into top-quality nursing homes than private-pay patients, and nursing homes with mostly private-pay patients provide much better care than those facilities dependent on Medicaid patients. To avoid having to choose between inheritance and consigning Mom and Dad to second-rate care in understaffed nursing homes, Medicaid planning gurus often recommend that the patient retain enough money to pay privately for at least six months to get into a top-notch nursing home. The elderly patient then "spends down" to qualify for Medicaid, yet at the same time remains in the high-quality, well-regarded nursing home. It's the best of all worlds: Mom and Pop get top-notch care, the kids get the full inheritance, and taxpayers foot the bill.

Although there is little empirical data on the precise extent of asset sheltering by the elderly and their attorneys, Medicaid officials throughout the country say that the practice is widespread. For instance, Massachusetts Medicaid workers have reported that roughly 30 percent to 50 percent of Medicaid applications from affluent Boston suburbs involve the sheltering of assets.

The policy implications of this trend are enormous. Taxpayer dollars are being used to preserve the assets of the middle-class and fairly well-to-do elderly, while Medicaid dollars for poor women and children and the elderly poor are scarce. In addition, with the vast majority of their patients on Medicaid, many nursing homes are in desperate shape financially. Since Medicaid reimbursement covers only about 80 percent of the full cost of care, nursing homes have to charge more from private-pay patients—those middle- to upper-income elderly who, either misinformed or highly principled, aren't inclined to make the rest of us pay their medical bills. For those covered by private insurance, this cost is passed on in the form of higher premiums.

In an effort to crack down on such abuses, states such as New York and Connecticut are developing "public-private" solutions that would allow individuals to retain some of their assets and still qualify for Medicaid. Under the Connecticut venture, for example, an individual buys an experimental policy that pays nursing home bills up to a fixed amount, say, $100,000. Once the coverage runs out, Medicaid kicks in automatically. At first glance, these programs seem to be a palatable compromise. The problem is that unless the federal Medicaid eligibility requirements are tightened, there's little incentive to buy three years' worth of private insurance when one can qualify for Medicaid almost immediately.

What to do? The inspector general of the Department of Health and Human Services laid the groundwork for a feasible solution in two major studies released in 1988 and 1989. Congress should tighten many of the loopholes in the Social Security Act, strengthening the transfer of assets rules so that patients could not artificially impoverish themselves to qualify for Medicaid. Congress should also allow families to retain and manage property while their parents are on Medicaid. In return, as a condition of eligibility for such public assistance, the government would require a lien (which would equal the total amount of Medicaid benefits paid) be placed on the recipient's property and assets. But Congress hasn't followed through on these recommendations.

Recovery on estates should be made mandatory so that heirs cannot, in the words of one analyst, "reap the windfall of Medicaid subsidies." With the exception of Oregon, however, most states have proved reluctant to recover expenses from the estates of deceased Medicaid recipients. Recovery programs are politically unpopular but they save states money that can then be plowed back into Medicaid budgets. Congress could provide an incentive to states to build up effective recovery programs by reducing federal Medicaid payments to those that fail to do so.

If the elderly and their heirs don't like these tougher rules, that's too bad. If seniors want to avoid liens on assets and estate recovery after their death, they should purchase private long-term care insurance by using the equity built up in their homes (which can cover the average senior citizen's medical bills) or insisting that their heirs contribute to the cost of care. Like it or not, it is not the birthright of upper-income and middle-class Americans to have their medical bills paid by the rest of us. At least not yet. •

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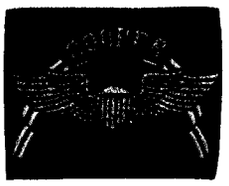

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Buchanan meets New Hampshire.

PAT PENDING

By Fred Barnes

HANOVER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Patrick J. Buchanan doesn't get the same tired questions as other presidential candidates in New Hampshire. After a speech on January 8 to a packed auditorium (900 inside, 200 turned away) at Dartmouth College, he was asked: "If you had a son and he told you he was gay, would you disown him?" Buchanan paused, then passed up the chance to gay bash. He said he doesn't have a son, and even if he did, "What could you do about something like that?" Another student asked if Buchanan believes this country is "a Judeo-Christian nation." He responded that "it was, but it isn't today," and went on to defend "traditional religion." A third student complained, with a straight face, about Buchanan's reference to Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping as an "85-year-old, chain-smoking Communist dwarf" and asked if he shouldn't be "more sensitive to the vertically challenged"? His answer was a gentle no. By the end, the crowd was less hostile to Buchanan than he was to them. He was applauded respectfully. As he drove away Buchanan asked his campaign political director Paul Erickson (a Yale graduate), "Don't these people have a sense of humor?"

Here's what I draw from Buchanan's performance at Dartmouth and elsewhere in New Hampshire: he's a surprisingly effective candidate. This wasn't a given. Writing columns, bickering on "The McLaughlin Group," and hectoring guests on "Crossfire" don't necessarily make someone a good candidate. They put a premium on ideological combat, not controlled airing of a message. Erickson, 30, lured from his job as a real estate developer and movie producer, had his doubts about Buchanan. Would Buchanan be accepted as a legitimate candidate for president and not a conservative polemicist on a lark? Would Buchanan "take to the rigors of being a candidate and do the things minimally required to run for office"? Erickson's fears vanished on December 10, the day Buchanan announced and campaigned into the night. "He holds up well physically, he doesn't get sick easily, he has no special dietary restrictions, [his wife] Shelley is a star on the road, and he knows when he shakes hands with people to look them in the eye," says Erickson. And he has a more forceful message for Republican primary voters in New Hampshire than President Bush.

Bush ought to be worried about the Buchanan challenge—but not terrorized by it. Buchanan will make a respectable showing in the February 18 primary, but the possibility of beating Bush or even losing narrowly is remote. Buchanan trailed Bush 46 percent to 30 percent in an early January poll by American Research Group (ARG) of Manchester, New Hampshire. But drawing that close was the easy part for Buchanan. To close the gap, Buchanan needs three things to happen, and odds are, all three won't. First, the economy in the state must worsen, or at least appear to. Second, Bush must stumble badly, which he's quite capable of doing. Third, Buchanan's TV ads must click with voters.

The amazing thing is that Bush remains reasonably popular here. A December poll for WMUR-TV by David Moore of the University of New Hampshire put Bush's approval rating at 62 percent (disapproval 26 percent)—this despite the state's economic downturn and despite the fact that only 22 percent of Republicans approve of Bush's handling of the economy, according to the ARG survey. Buchanan's hope in New Hampshire is based on Ronald Reagan's coup in 1980. Reagan got 50 percent against a strong Republican field (Bush, Bob Dole, Howard Baker, John Anderson). But Reagan was a Republican icon, a status Buchanan hasn't achieved. The universe of New Hampshire Republicans—as many as 100,000 may vote—is ideologically tailored for a moderate-to-conservative candidate like Bush, not an unflinching right-winger like Buchanan. Among likely Republican primary voters, ARG found that 12 percent describe themselves as very conservative, 47 percent as somewhat conservative, 24 percent as somewhat liberal, and 5 percent as liberal. ARG didn't ask if anyone was a middle-of-the-roader, but 8 percent said they were anyway. Bush is likely to get the liberals, moderates, and a large chunk of the somewhat conservatives. Bush, after all, *is* somewhat conservative.

Just by showing up, Buchanan is guaranteed 20 percent to 25 percent. That's the hard-core conservative vote that went for Jack Kemp (13 percent), Pete duPont (10 percent), and Pat Robertson (9 percent) in 1988—minus conservatives who like Bush because he's Reagan's heir and an incumbent GOP president. The trick for Buchanan is reaching beyond the core and attracting Republicans upset about Bush and the economy. Buchanan has some powerful issues to tap: taxes, protectionism, opposition to foreign aid, and Bush's betrayal of conservative promises and his alleged indifference to economic suffering in New Hampshire. "The only unemployed guy Bush knows in New Hampshire is John Sununu," cracks Buchanan.

The Buchanan campaign has a single speechwriter: Buchanan. He wrote his announcement and stump speech, and drafted his campaign brochure ("Friends, our beloved country has come to a critical crossroads"). The stump speech is studded with one-liners. The president "ought to come home and put a Denver boot on Air Force One." Kemp, by staying in the Bush Cabinet as housing secretary, "has gone native on us. He's wearing native garb." Budget director Richard Darman, the architect of the 1990 budget deal and tax hike, is "the Dr. Kevorkian of the American recovery." Washington lobbyists for Japan, like Bush adviser Charles Black, are "the

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geisha girls of the new world order."

The tax issue appeals to faithful conservatives, and Buchanan exploits it fully. That issue helped drive former U.S. Representative Chuck Douglas of Concord to the Buchanan camp, where he's now chief strategist. "I still can't get over [Bush's breaking] the tax pledge," he says. "I never will." But Buchanan is using protectionism to woo non-true believers, the Republicans anxious about the economy. He says he's a "trade hawk," not a protectionist, but it's a distinction without a difference. He notes that America became the "greatest industrial power in the world" in the half-century before World War I, a period of high tariffs. Conservatives in "upholstered think tanks in Washington" don't understand what's happening to manufacturers across America. Textile mills in New Hampshire have been wiped out by foreign competition, he says. "Go out and visit Detroit today, my friends. It is Beirut." Bush wants a level playing field in world trade, Buchanan says, but the Japanese want supremacy. Buchanan would pursue American trade dominance as president. Vince Lombardi "didn't say he wanted a level playing field. He said winning isn't everything. He said winning is the only thing.... America needs to be led by the same type of tough economic nationalist who will put America first."

The Bush forces were painfully slow to respond to Buchanan's trade pitch, or to anything in New Hampshire. Until his visit on January 15, Bush hadn't been to the state since October 1990, when he campaigned in Manchester for U.S. Senator Bob Smith. Even then conservatives were apoplectic about Bush's reneging on the tax promise. Jackie Domaingue, a Manchester alderman who backed Kemp in 1988 but "held my nose and voted for Bush" in the fall, proposed that the city not pay the $10,000 for police overtime for Bush's visit. Her motion passed unanimously, and the Smith campaign had to foot the bill. Until Vice President Dan Quayle came to New Hampshire on January 8 and 9, the Bushies hadn't directly assaulted Buchanan. Quayle, who solicited advice from Smith and former Senator Gordon Humphrey, declared Bush had gotten the message that people in New Hampshire are suffering. "The president understands that, and he's going to do something about it. But don't send a message of isolationism. Don't send a message of protectionism." New Hampshire has 35,000 jobs "directly related to exports," Quayle said, jobs that would be lost under a protectionist policy. Quayle, by the way, campaigned at factories that have thrived during the recession and rely on exports. Buchanan concentrates on factories that have closed or had their work forces depleted.

The Bush campaign did a halfhearted job of lining up major Republicans behind Bush. Sununu, Bush's ex-chief of staff, doesn't have much of an organization left in the state (he was governor from 1984 to 1988). Besides, he doesn't get along with Governor Judd Gregg or his dad, former Governor Hugh Gregg, the leaders of the Bush campaign. Judd Gregg has criticized Sununu for leaving him a budget deficit of $40 million, and the Greggs and Sununu feuded over who would run a ski festival. Sununu, in short, has no role in the Bush campaign. "He's still on the payroll in Washington," says Hugh Gregg. "There's not much he can do."

The most popular conservatives in the state, Smith and Humphrey, fell into Bush's lap almost by accident. Buchanan never called Smith, which made it easy for Smith to endorse Bush. Humphrey got a call, but he told Buchanan that challenging Bush was a mistake. The president "is already a lot weaker than people think." Also, he disagreed with Buchanan on foreign policy and trade. "Keep me posted," Humphrey said. Several days later a *Washington Times* story said Humphrey was backing Buchanan. When reporters called, he denied it, saying he "expected to support President Bush." That constituted an endorsement, and a few weeks later Bush called to thank him. Humphrey urged the president to "roll out his economic opportunity package now and not wait for the State of the Union address." Bush said a curt "thank you" and hung up.

Now energized, the Bushies are playing hardball. When state Republican chair Rhona Charbonneau said she would remain neutral, she was attacked by executive councilor Bernard Streeter. He said she shouldn't abandon an incumbent president. The Greggs and the White House have made it difficult for Buchanan to appear at Republican functions. Republicans in Carroll County invited him to speak at their Lincoln Day dinner, only to be told that the state party had arranged for Senator Phil Gramm of Texas, a Bush supporter, to speak. The invitation to Buchanan was retracted. And when Rockingham County Republicans considered Buchanan as a speaker, the White House hastily arranged for Quayle to appear instead.

Buchanan has one important ally, the conservative *Manchester Union-Leader*, the only newspaper that circulates statewide. The paper carried Buchanan's column for years. He's a good friend of publisher Nacky Loeb and editor Joe McQuaid, whose wife and son are volunteer workers in the Buchanan campaign. Buchanan came to Manchester last January 16 when he was initially considering a challenge to Bush. He addressed the state Republican committee, then ate dinner with McQuaid at Currier's restaurant, where they got word the air war had begun in Iraq. The war snuffed out Buchanan's campaign dreams, but the recession revived them ten months later.

Buchanan has staked his entire campaign on a breakthrough in New Hampshire. In an open race, he might win. Against an incumbent, the odds against him are prohibitive. Even Reagan, a challenger much stronger than Buchanan, lost in 1976 to President Gerald Ford, an incumbent much weaker than Bush. On Christmas eve, Buchanan happened to confront Humphrey while campaigning in a Concord mall. Humphrey was doing last-minute shopping and, he says, "practically walked into Pat's arms." They shook hands and joked. "Pat twitted me about being an establishment man." The trouble for Buchanan is that the establishment usually wins. •

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THE ANOINTED

By Sidney Blumenthal

The rise of Bill Clinton has been so sudden that his campaign advisers have been filled with an uneasy disbelief. "I'm extremely nervous about the whole thing," says Frank Greer, Clinton's media director. "It's going too well. No votes have been taken. I hate being in this perilous front-runner status." "I keep thinking, Harkin will come back, Kerrey will be coming back," worries George Stephanopoulos, the deputy campaign manager. "The timing doesn't feel right to me," frets Stanley Greenberg, Clinton's pollster. "There's a steady movement up. I don't quite understand how it happened given the limited exposure of the public to any of the candidates. None of them has moved up since September except Clinton." Clinton himself refuses to acknowledge his fortune out of fear of hubris. "Can you imagine?" he says to Stephanopoulos, referring to a reporter. "That guy asked me how I felt being so far ahead."

Various theories have already gained currency to explain Clinton's emergence. One focuses on the material side: he has better organization, more money, and a better press. Yet he started out on an equal footing. Another zeroes in on the ideological factor: he is being cast as the most electable candidate in a conservative era, because he is a Southerner. Yet within the party's liberal core, he is drawing strong support—from policy experts and activists, minorities, even labor. Their attraction to him reflects in part a simple desire to win. But it's more than that. It is not as though they have deep reservations that they are struggling to overcome to reach their decisions. In fact, they do not feel that this is a hard choice at all.

The primaries are not shaping up as an Armageddon of left against right, or as the takeover by an outsider unlettered in the ways of the party. Clinton is not being inflated into the front-runner on the helium of media hype. Clinton is winning the invisible primary, the one conducted in the minds of many in the party before the balloting begins. For all the scholarly arguments that the parties have been shunted to the side by the plebiscitary primaries, there is still a good deal of peer review that affects the outcome. In the case of Clinton, it is those in the loosely formed presidential party, rather than the congressional party, whose judgments have been elevating him.

Who the hell is Bill Clinton? If you have to ask, you're not a Democratic honcho. He is one of the best-known people among the party elites. There is probably not a single one among them of even marginal importance who has not made his acquaintance. Since he ran the Texas operation for George McGovern in 1972 with Taylor Branch, Clinton has introduced himself to ever-widening circles of party activists, intellectuals, and officials. Though he is only 45, he has served longer as governor of Arkansas than any other sitting governor has served in any other state. When he gave his infamous nominating speech for Michael Dukakis at the 1988 convention, he was better known to more of the delegates than the candidate. A month before the event, for example, he gave a speech on the need for a national economic strategy to a conference of several hundred policy wonks gathered by the Democracy Project. These talking heads, with Ralph Nader loping on the sidelines, may have been hoping for a Dukakis administration, but they were Clinton's crowd. His wife, Hillary, fits right in. She attended Yale Law and serves as chairperson for the Children's Defense Fund. She is among the country's leading experts on educational reform and is an articulate public speaker. Her contacts apply a multiplier effect to his.

The swift coalescing around Clinton is at least as much a sociological as a political phenomenon. For he is the standard-bearer of a new Democratic establishment that has never really wielded national power but impatiently wants its chance in the aftermath of Reaganism. With the emergence of Clinton follows a whole phalanx of thinkers who have been gathering since the demise of Jimmy Carter. A few held minor positions in the Carter administration. Some of them worked for Gary Hart's campaign of "new ideas," which also implied the ascension of those with the ideas; even more joined the Dukakis effort, each one slotted like graduate students assigned classes at the Kennedy School. In exchange for their raised expectations, in each case, they received crushing disillusionment. With Clinton they feel that, despite his rightward shifts with the currents of the 1980s, they know him as an essentially liberal entity. The overwhelming feeling is relief.

The backgrounds of Clinton's campaign staff help

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explain the social dimensions of his political reach. Though they are almost all a notch or two to his left (with only a couple several degrees to his right), they, too, belong to the same political cohort as Clinton. This is not a fraternity, but a fairly close-knit group that lies near the center of the party. Clinton's major policy advisers (who have all been his friends since the late 1960s) are Robert Reich (Harvard public policy professor, TNR contributing editor, *American Prospect* editor); Ira Magaziner (management consultant); and Derek Shearer (public policy professor at Occidental, former editor of *Working Papers*). Rob Shapiro, the vice president of the Progressive Policy Institute, the Democratic Leadership Council think tank, is often part of their discussions. Clinton's top politicos include Stanley Greenberg (former political science professor at Yale); Frank Greer (media and labor consultant); campaign manager David Wilhelm (a former staffer at Citizens for Tax Justice); James Carville (a political consultant from Louisiana, whose last campaign was Harris Wofford's); and the campaign executive committee chairman, Mickey Kantor (an L.A. lawyer who helped set up the War on Poverty and served on the board of the Legal Services Corporations with Hillary Clinton). This suggests the network within the party, operating out of the limelight, that is largely responsible for the pre-primary groundswell.

BILL CLINTON BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

The essential principle of Clinton's agenda—leaner, activist government—is the result of a rethinking of the future of liberalism and the Democratic Party that he and his wife have been part of for years. This long project may be called The Conversation. The Conversation is not about the nuts and bolts of getting elected. It is about why one should get elected and what to do if one is. Certain false cues have been part of this process, such as the search for labels (e.g., neoliberalism) as if these were political conclusions. Though certain ideas have become widely held among those in The Conversation, there has developed no simple orthodoxy, like Reaganism.

From the start, Clinton has been part of The Conversation, perhaps having more ties to more of those in it than any other elected Democrat. Over the years he has mastered the whole domestic policy curriculum that has evolved. He has done all the reading, and in Arkansas, an unpromising laboratory, tested some ideas in education and worker training, among others. But his experiments have sometimes fallen short. In his first term as governor, the graduate of Georgetown, the Rhodes Scholar, Yale Law alum, and McGovern activist, tried to do everything at once. And in 1980 he was defeated. Two years later he won back the governorship. "Some of my liberal critics have said that I was too cautious," says Clinton. "But I think you'd be hard-pressed to find a place where the state government has been a stronger instrument of change. What I learned out of that '80 defeat was that you have to focus, you have to explain to people very clearly where you are in history.... You have to keep them focused on two or three things and explain all your initiatives in terms of that. And you have to carry the people along with you.... I have been profoundly impressed by how much it was possible to do."

Clinton is as conversant as any of his experts on the details of policies. He is also aware of the differences among them. I asked him, for example, how he squared the seeming contradictions between the extensive research of Greenberg on the fears and hopes of working-class Reagan Democrats who have been alienated from the party with the notion advanced by Reich in his latest book, *The Work of Nations*, that the realities of the global economy render only human capital non-portable across national boundaries, making education the salient priority. Clinton's instant answer was "Ira Magaziner," whose books have argued how to rebuild a U.S. manufacturing base. "You have to have an economic strategy that goes beyond just educating the work force," said Clinton. "There are things you can do to

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organize to compete and win in the global economy and maintain a manufacturing base." For hours, if you will listen, he will gladly enumerate them.

Unlike Dukakis, Clinton is no mere technocrat. Dukakis was not really part of The Conversation, but a consumer of formalistic aspects of it. He didn't listen very well, and he mechanically repeated what he had learned as though case studies were scripture. According to Reich, who has advised both men, the contrast is striking: "Dukakis had complicated issues staffs. There were thousands of written position papers put into three-ring binders—the most complicated arrangement you can imagine. I don't know where the issues staff is with Clinton. He knows the issues as well as anybody. We have conference calls and Rob Shapiro says at the end, 'Clinton knows those issues better than I do.' Not only does he know them at a conceptual level but at a practical level. 'Adviser' is a peculiar kind of term to apply to the relationship. It's more like a kitchen debate."

Clinton has successive layers of polish: the policy expert, the folksy pol who loves to wade into crowds, and the savvy politico. "Clinton," says John Sasso, who was Dukakis's campaign manager, "has learned lessons from the last defeat. You have to make a sustained case for change in a very thematic way. That was the larger mistake of '88. Our real failing was not making a sustained case for change, which created the vacuum for flags and furloughs."

Clinton's ideological deftness has been among his chief political assets in the invisible primary. With a definite consistency, he has taken up the task of ideological circle-squaring. His tougher workfare proposals appeal to the right, but also to the left because they provide for more education and child care. His talk of "rights and responsibilities" for the underclass not only points to their own role in uplifting themselves, but is a wedge for more government activism. He is not only for restoring progressive taxation rates on the wealthy, but for a middle-class cut. As for his long-term economic strategy, he is for educational reform and infrastructure rebuilding. But he's not in favor of industry-specific investment. Rather he favors a civilian version of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency and net investment tax credits. At the same time, he's firmly anti-protectionist and favors fast-track free trade with Mexico.

The word "investment" itself—the most common one in the Democrats' new policy vocabulary—suggests the impulse for circle-squaring. Clinton does not retreat from justifying his new approaches with an unabashed defense of government activism. In his television spot airing in New Hampshire, he is plain about it: "Democrats who want government to do more—and I'm one of them—have to show fiscal responsibility." And he asks that voters call in so they can receive his detailed plan, which he is also mass mailing to every registered Democrat and has distributed to local libraries. Thus, Clinton has made policy specificity a threshold test in the primaries.

Three large external factors have made it possible for him to advance his candidacy within the party through his circle-squaring agenda. The first is the recent history of the party in which the vacuity of Carter was followed by the catastrophic response of Walter Mondale, who attempted to restore the Humphrey tradition by fixing it on Hooverite tax increases, followed disastrously by Dukakis, who was struck dumb until two weeks before election day when he inauthentically mouthed populist slogans. The second factor is the Bush recession, which has made a long-term economic strategy politically compelling. Bush, after all, has presided over the lowest period of growth since the end of World War II.

And then there is the most profound historic factor of all: the end of the cold war. With the cold war in place, Clinton would have been under stress as a Southerner to prove his bona fides as a defense Democrat, and as a national Democrat to prove himself as an arms controller. Like Al Gore's campaign in 1988, Clinton's might never have cohered. But with the cold war's end, the burden of proof has been lifted. The factional strife that violently rent the party at the 1968 convention—a fissure crucial to the rise of Reaganism—has dissipated.

The problem of the Democratic Leadership Council in his candidacy, which had a potential for harsh polarization, has been resolved fairly easily because the cold war is cold ashes. The DLC, founded in 1985 by Southern and Western politicians in the aftermath of Mondale's humiliating defeat, assumed a conservative dominance in the country and envisioned politics on a sharp left-right axis. As the DLC convention in 1991 approached, waves of ear-splitting static began to surround it when a few DLC leaders used the occasion for attacking the rest of the party, as if only the DLC were legitimate. Quietly and belatedly, Clinton, according to sources close to him, called in outside political advisers (now running his campaign) to vet DLC positions and his own speech. He did not fully trust "the political judgment" of some in the DLC, he confided to these sources. At the steering committee meeting of his presidential exploratory committee, held in September 1991 in Washington, more than forty of his key supporters convened to discuss his candidacy. The DLC position—urging Clinton to adopt a Southern-based campaign of exclusionary strife that would be openly critical of liberalism within the party—was rebuffed by Clinton's politicos. With that, the DLC political strategy, as such, reached its conclusion.

Yet the DLC was assimilated into the process. Its think tank, the Progressive Policy Institute, has been integral to policy and speechwriting. But the role Clinton has played has been Mitterrandesque, defanging by embracing. "I don't think the DLC has much meaning," says one of Clinton's senior advisers. "Within the primary electorate, being Southern is more of a problem." "He's not a creature of the DLC at all. The DLC is a crea-

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ture of Bill Clinton," says David Osborne, co-author of a forthcoming book that Clinton cites as influential, *Reinventing Government*. Still, Clinton feels the need to explain himself on this score. "I got all sorts of grief about my involvement in the DLC," he says. "But I never would have gotten involved if it was going to push the country to the right."

In recent months Clinton has ridden fortune. The prospect of Mario Cuomo's candidacy loomed so large that when it evaporated, the candidate poised somewhat falsely as his opposite was lifted into the swooping vacuum. Much of the press was prepared to cast the contest as left versus right, tradition against newness. No matter how hard Clinton might have resisted, he would have been twisted out of shape and portrayed as something he's not. "The danger was being pushed to the right, categorized as conservative and having a label take over," says a Clinton adviser. Cuomo's non-candidacy also coincided with the precipitous fall in the standing of George Bush, raising the value of the Democratic nomination. The effect on the others also served Clinton's cause. Tom Harkin's moment may have been when the party felt it had no chance and wanted emotional release through outbursts of barnyard epithets. The withdrawal of Douglas Wilder has created the first primary season since 1980 in which there is no black candidate. Clinton, as a progressive Southerner, has a more natural affinity with blacks than either Harkin or Bob Kerrey, who come from virtually all-white rural states.

Kerrey, in a curious way, represents the false premise of the DLC, which pined for a battle-hardened war hero—if not Kerrey himself, then the image. His candidacy was a response to the warrior symbolism of the GOP, intended to tarnish the Democrats as soft. But with the ending of the cold war and the bloom off the Gulf war, that argument has faltered. Bereft of much of a rationale beyond his biography, Kerrey is not a part of The Conversation. What he has is not a deep reserve of support in the invisible primary, but a hastily assembled campaign team. Overnight, he has imploded into a TV ad in which the advocate of the Mexican free-trade pact suddenly materializes at a hockey net as the protectionist goalie: "Fight Back, America!" The slogan recalls Dick Gephardt's ad in the 1988 campaign: "It's your fight, too!" Both were produced by political consultant Bob Shrum, who may be the main barrier between Clinton and the nomination.

The Shrum attack comes at the moment of Bush's collapse at the Tokyo summit, the first summit after the fall of communism, a summit focused on the issue of economic power. Bush came as Commodore Perry and left as Homer Simpson. Clinton's grand opportunity is to enter the breach, to make the case for an economic strategy that gets tough and smart: "This administration and its predecessors, by having no economic strategy, have presided over economic decline, the destruction of the idea of progress," he says.

Integral to this is a rescue of the idea of practical, active government within the Democratic Party. This idea, muffled by loftier rhetoric on the left, was betrayed in recent years by the candidacy of Jimmy Carter. Within the Democratic Party, part of Clinton's appeal is that he is a Southerner who exorcises Carter's anti-government piety without reiterating the old position. He offers a genuine fusion of various converging strands within the Democratic Conversation. The peaceable kingdom within his campaign is a suggestion that he has the potential to heal the Democrats' internal wounds.

"He's the opposite of Jimmy Carter," says Peter Edelman, a longtime friend, former aide to Robert Kennedy, and associate dean of the Georgetown University Law Center. (His wife, Marion Wright Edelman, is president of the Children's Defense Fund.) "Bill's not running against government. It's not that he's a big government person. But he believes in a serious role for government." The contrasts are instructive. Clinton and Carter are from different classes and generations in the South. Carter was the son of a local planter, a Naval Academy graduate, a product of the post-New Deal Eisenhower era. Clinton's father died before he was born; his mother was a nurse, his stepfather an alcoholic Buick dealer. Clinton's education was not technical, but cosmopolitan. His formative political years were during the New Frontier, when the civil rights movement changed the segregated South in which he lived, and the federal government was viewed as a positive instrument by Southern liberals. "I was around Carter a lot," says Greer, an Alabama native. "He did not understand politics in the Democratic tradition. He came to this town wanting to be against government. Bill understands that you have to overcome people's sense that government can't do anything. He and I grew up in a South we thought would never change, but we saw a positive change." "I never viewed government as the enemy," says Clinton. "I think it has to be radically reformed so that the taxpayers feel it serves them."

Clinton's circle-squaring formulas may not ultimately be able to weld together the post-cold war Democratic Party. The primaries, after all, have not begun. But the promise of his nomination, even if it led to defeat in November, might be to solidify an epochal change: Clinton would be a pro-government candidate almost all the party could support and force a new political dynamic that could eventually bring about a Democratic victory. Reaganism was about the end of policy. The intent was to immobilize government, leaving the action to the private sector. Clinton is about the renaissance of policy, informed by the Reagan years but moving clearly away from them. His unwitting ally in the campaign may well be George Bush, who, attempting to divine what he thinks by responding haphazardly to criticisms and polls, is unconsciously positioning himself in the role of the Me-Too Republican. The broad post-Reagan debate is in full swing. Bush is baffled. Clinton, initially, is engaged. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Alabama and Elsewhere

First, the good news. Jessica Tandy gives a lovely performance in **Fried Green Tomatoes** (Universal). She plays a Southern woman of 82, resident in an Alabama nursing home, lonely but lively, who fixes on a woman who is visiting someone else and who tells the visitor some segments of a life story on several occasions. It's no surprise to learn eventually that the major person in that story was the Tandy character as a young woman, but the lack of surprise doesn't matter. Tandy's telling of the tale—interrupted by long flashbacks to dramatize what she narrates—is done with such seductive naïveté, underpinned by a splendid actress's design, that we could listen to her much longer than we do.

Her performance is one more example of the way that films cash in on theater experience. Not all good film acting derives from extensive stage experience (Debra Winger, Anjelica Huston, Gene Hackman, Jack Nicholson are a few contrary examples), but from the very start, film has been nourished by theater. Much film material was, is, probably will be, derived from plays; but what is at least as important—maybe, in the long aesthetic run, more important—is that films have provided a means of preserving the art of gifted theater actors. Sometimes this happens with material in which the actor is at his best, as with John Gielgud in *Prospero's Books*. Sometimes it's with lesser stuff, as with Tandy here. Still, we can be grateful. (Coincidence: Tandy played Cordelia to Gielgud's Lear in 1940.)

Fried Green Tomatoes is notable chiefly because her performance in it will be saved. The role came to Tandy, I suppose, because of her success in *Driving Miss Daisy*, a part of much greater range. In this new picture, the filmmakers, doubtless with her agreement, decided to utilize the physical data of her age: wrinkles, liver spots, etc. This hyper-realistic touch wasn't needed, but after a few seconds of shock, Tandy looks beautiful again.

Now the not-so-good news. The visitor to whom Tandy talks, played by Kathy Bates, is a role that's part stock, part nonsense. (Her life is affected by the story Tandy tells, so she begins to remodel her home single-handedly.) The main story, to which we frequently flash back, has its problems, too. It's about two young women, played by Mary-Louise Parker and Mary Stuart Masterson. They live in an Alabama town. Parker marries and moves away. Her husband proves to be a wife-beater. Masterson rescues her and brings her home.

The husband pursues and is eventually murdered. The mystery about this hangs over the whole film. The two women open a café in a place called Whistle Stop where they specialize in fried green tomatoes, apparently a Southern specialty, and they work along together until one of them dies and the café falls into desuetude. It turns out of course that Tandy is the survivor of the pair.

The screenplay, by Fannie Flagg and the director Jon Avnet, from a novel by Flagg, suffers from two burdens. First, it trades heavily on routine Southernness—the wistfulness, the special friendliness, the special hates. No doubt these are precise—Flagg is from Alabama—but the milieu, overused, is wearing away into cliché. (*Steel Magnolias*, *The Miss Firecracker Contest*, innumerable others.) Scented angst is a Southern growth industry.

The second trouble is the script's implicit cowardice. Every attribute of the story of these two young women implies a lesbian attachment. For that lesbian love, Masterson rescues Parker, and that love warms their subsequent lives. That love also helps to explain (*not* justify) the battering by Parker's husband, who presumably senses it. But the screenplay omits any mention of this implied component.

Bates's chubby clubbiness keeps her afloat. Parker, as she showed in *Grand Canyon*, is a two-dimensional actress. She thinks that maneuvering her mouth around is acting. Masterson has some strength and tenderness. Avnet's directing isn't bothersome. But there's really only one reason to see this film, cited at the start.

The recession has apparently affected the creativity of some well-known directors, abroad and at home. What is Pedro Almodóvar if he isn't cleverly wicked? In **High Heels** (Miramax) the cleverness is sparse and the wickedness has fattened into melodrama. A popular actress-singer has a daughter from whom she

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Bugsy. *Warren Beatty as the 1940s hood Bugsy Siegel, Annette Bening as his weather-wise mistress. Torrid love in the midst of crime and killings. (Reviewed 12/23&30/91)*
JFK. *Oliver Stone's history is highly suppositious, but his filmmaking is terrific. Minimally, Stone underscores the inadequacy of the Warren Commission report. View it all with caution, if the film's power permits. (1/27/92)* **Kafka.** *It shows that Steven Soderbergh, who made* sex, lies, and videotape, *was no directorial flash in the pan. But this thriller, set in 1919 Prague with the author as hero, has a silly script. (1/6&13/92)*
Prospero's Books. *Peter Greenaway's version of* The Tempest. *His pictures are gorgeous, if irrelevant. What matters is John Gielgud's reading of Prospero and some other roles—a magnificent example of a possibly dying Shakespearean art. (1/20/92)* **—SK**

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has been separated for many years. In the interim, the daughter—in Madrid—marries one of the mother's former lovers, and he tries to resume that affair when mom returns to Madrid. Murder follows, and ultimately the dying mother claims she did it.

When *Rhapsody in Blue*, a bio-pic about George Gershwin, was shown in Latin America, it was retitled *A Mother's Tears*. If Almodóvar reminds you of that, he's slipping. A few laughs, one scene of weird sex, very little ingenious directing, and a lot of mother's tears. The only charm is the daughter, Victoria Abril, who was the porn star in *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* and whose sparkle does not fade.

Wim Wenders's **Until the End of the World** (Warner Bros.) is a madness. Wenders's career has declined since the early days of *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, as his wanderlust has increased. Except for his last film, *Wings of Desire*, a partial respite, he has done a lot of journeying—in such films as *Alice in the Cities*, *Kings of the Road*, *The American Friend*, and *Paris, Texas*. His latest, very long film takes place in many cities in Europe and America and ends in the Australian desert. When the story clarifies, it turns out to be a banal sci-fi mystery—about a camera whose special power is to enable the blind to receive pictures in the brain.

William Hurt is being chased around the globe by people who want to kill him for the secret of the camera. He ends up in the Aussie outback at a laboratory run by his father, Max von Sydow, who is working on the camera to help his blind wife, Jeanne Moreau. What these actors are doing in this long-winded yet elliptical bore is more mysterious than the supposed mystery of the plot. Solveig Dommartin, who was the trapeze artist in *Wings of Desire*, is also unhelpfully present—a great deal.

In Syberberg's *Our Hitler* there's a sequence in which Hitler's former film projectionist gives us some "human" glimpses of der Führer. This was credible, and therefore gruesomely pertinent, as an item in a large-scale film. Andrei Konchalovsky's **The Inner Circle** (Columbia) is completely devoted to the true story of Stalin's film projectionist. He found Stalin a friendly man, full of little jokes, concerned about this man's well-being. This, too, is credible, but it's out of balance here because the film is mostly devoted to the projectionist's life, which is of insufficient interest otherwise. Tom Hulce, Mr. Mediocrity, plays the projectionist. Lolita Davidovich has some appeal as his wife who becomes a victim of the Kremlin. •

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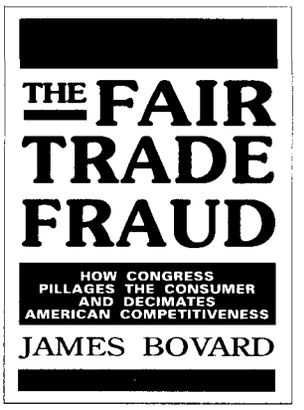

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Oliver Stone's riveting offense against history.

Mr. Smith Goes to the Twilight Zone

BY RONALD STEEL

The trouble with *JFK* is not that Oliver Stone thinks that Lee Harvey Oswald did not kill John F. Kennedy all by himself. Few Americans believe that he did. Nor is it that he thumbs his nose at the Establishment and the institutions of American power. They deserve more lèse majesté than they get. Nor is it even that Stone believes there was some deep dark plot reaching into the Mafia, renegade fringes of the CIA, and even into the White House itself. *JFK* is only a movie, after all, and while we munch popcorn in the dark we grant Hollywood free rein to spin what fantasies it will.

No, the trouble with this exciting and irreverent movie lies elsewhere: partly in the technology of the movies, partly in the determination of Stone to pin the tail on whatever donkey he can find to explain how Everything Went Wrong. Because of the director's ability to cut, splice, fuse, restage, and invent, it is virtually impossible for a viewer of his film to tell if he is seeing a real or a phony event. Stone mixes real black-and-white footage, such as the Zapruder film of Kennedy's murder, with restaged black-and-white episodes that may or may not have happened. The result is a deconstructionist's heaven. Every event becomes a pseudo-event, fictions become fact, imagination becomes reality, and the whole tangible world disappears. Watching *JFK* is like entering the Twilight Zone. This would be very well if Stone intended *JFK* to be a hall of mirrors, rather like Errol Morris's *The Thin Blue Line*, but he is neither so modest nor so complex. He would have us believe that the fictions and the speculations and the pseudo-documentary re-enactments are created to serve a more noble truth, to which they will lead us.

That truth, according to Stone, is that Kennedy had to die because he was trying to extricate the United States from Vietnam. Among the agents of his death, in addition to the loony suspects on the left, on the right, and in the lower depths, was no less than Lyndon Johnson. For this allegation Stone offers no proof whatsoever, other than that Johnson lived to fight the war in Vietnam and Kennedy didn't. Now this is certainly not a conclusion that either reason or evidence compelled Stone to reach. Over the years a lot of theories have been proposed—in addition to the official Warren Commission one—about who might have wanted Kennedy dead. The mob was angry because of his brother's crackdown on racketeers, the Cubans were angry because he was trying to assassinate Fidel, the anti-Castroites were angry because he had declined to invade the island, the Vietnamese were angry because he had allowed Diem to be overthrown and murdered, the neanderthal racists were angry because he was pushing civil rights in the South, the freelance killers in the CIA were angry because he was cramping their style. None of these theories, of course, has ever been proved.

But Stone is not merely the latest in a long line of wild speculators about the assassination. What is novel in his film is his contention that Kennedy was murdered because he intended to wind down the war in Vietnam. This is a notion that has never been seriously pursued, and for a very good reason: there is nothing in the record to support it. Kennedy rode into office denouncing Eisenhower for allowing a dangerous "missile gap" that posed a mortal danger to America's survival. (This is the same Eisenhower whom Stone shows approvingly in the opening frames of the movie as warning against the dangers of the "military-industrial complex.") Of course there was no missile gap, as Kennedy was forced to admit. But this did not prevent him from ratcheting up the military budget and building such an overwhelming first-strike capacity that the Russians launched a crash program of nuclear armament, which culminated in the dispatch of missiles to Cuba in the fall of 1962 and brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.

Stone bases his speculation on the fact that in the last months of his life Kennedy reached a nuclear test-ban accord with Khrushchev, gave a conciliatory speech toward the Russians, and signed a memorandum proposing that the South Vietnamese army take over the brunt of the fighting so that most of the Americans could withdraw. Whether such a withdrawal would have occurred, however, is highly problematic. And so is the way in which Kennedy would have responded if Saigon's forces collapsed, which is precisely the situation that confronted Johnson (who also wanted "no wider war") when the optimistic assessments of Robert McNamara, Maxwell Taylor, Walt Rostow, McGeorge Bundy, and his other Kennedy-appointed advisers proved to be wrong.

Would Kennedy, in those circumstances, have let the Communists take over South Vietnam, without using the American forces that all his advisers had assured him could bring victory? In support of his thesis, Stone quotes Kennedy's statement that "in the final analysis, it is they [the South Vietnamese] who have to win or lose this struggle." But Stone simply leaves out the next sentence of Kennedy's statement, in which he added: "But I don't agree with those who say we should withdraw. That would be a great mistake." It was to prevent a Communist takeover, after all, that Kennedy, only a few months before his trip to Dallas, gave the green light to the Saigon generals who overthrew, and then murdered, Ngo Dinh Diem, the elected president, and Ngo Dinh Nhu, his alter-ego brother. Kennedy's aides argued that Diem had to go because he wasn't prosecuting the war effectively; Nhu's offense was that he was suspected of cutting a deal with the North and wanting to kick the Americans out.

Stone, to be sure, can believe anything he likes about what Kennedy might have done. Still, the burden of proof lies with him, and the historical record points in the other direction. In 1963 American officials almost unanimously considered it inconceivable that the United States could not block a Communist victory. Enthusiasm was riding high after the Cuban missile crisis when the Russians ignominiously threw in the towel; and American strategists were convinced that the next struggle with communism lay in the nether regions of the Third World—and indeed it was for precisely those battles that Kennedy had created the new counterinsurgency forces and his beloved Green Berets. He could not have known, any more than Johnson could have known, what a swamp hole Vietnam would become several years later. What possibly would have induced him to renege on a commitment that he had made so proudly, and to which he had pledged American prestige?

One would do well, perhaps, not to protest too much, for it is questionable whether Stone himself has a rational

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basis for his proposition. One must look upon it, rather, as an expression of faith. As a man who fought in Vietnam and was every day exposed to its futility and its horrors, it is understandable that he should try to find an explanation for such an act of prolonged irrationality, that he should even believe it to have been the result of some grotesque conspiracy. Those of us who were fortunate enough to have been spared those daily confrontations with death cannot judge him for his concern. But surely we can question the conclusion he reaches.

That conclusion—that a good man sought to end the agonies of the Vietnam War and was struck down for this by the forces of darkness—is a purely emotional one. It is reinforced by the saccharine documentary footage that shows Kennedy as the youthful hero: smiling at adoring crowds, playing with his beautiful children, escorting his glamorous wife to high state functions. Stone's film is an exercise in an old-fashioned American naïveté, a work of the most hackneyed political romanticism. Except that in this instance Mr. Smith Goes to the Twilight Zone, where he is gunned down by the forces of darkness instead of triumphing over them.

There is something touchingly simple-minded in this approach to politics, which shrinks historical forces into conspiratorial plots by greedy men to do in virtuous ones. (Somebody should have told Stone to read *Major Barbara*.) If Stone were a Marxist, instead of a Hollywood liberal, he might have seen the Vietnam War not as a conspiracy, but as the natural expression of American state capitalism in its self-destructive imperialist mode. If he were a cynic, he would have placed the war in the loony geopolitics that persuaded three generations of American strategists that the political complexion of Third World outposts like Nicaragua and Vietnam was crucial to American security. But he is, at bottom, a sentimentalist, who has reduced the complexities of war, power, and ambition to the machinations of a few bad guys.

He also seems to yearn for someone to take him by the hand and lead him to the promised land. For a man of the left, Stone appears to have a disturbing weakness for the *Führer-prinzip*. That is the subtext of his entire movie. It comes through most explicitly in the speech to the jury that Stone has written for the Jim Garrison character. "We have all become Hamlets in our own country, children of a slain father-leader whose killers still possess the throne," an earnest Kevin Costner declares in words creepier than anything uttered by the assorted New Orleans weirdos and CIA spooks who form the devil's chorus of the film. "The ghost of John Kennedy confronts us with the secret murder at the heart of the American dream."

What seems never to have occurred to Stone is that there might be something unsavory in the American dream itself, something that cannot be explained away by a few vicious plotters. He certainly has not entertained the possibility that Kennedy himself might have been an expression of some of the dark forces. It is a pity that Stone takes such a superficial view of his hero, for in fact Kennedy was a subtle politician and in many ways a deeply cynical man. Unlike his brother Robert, he was in no sense a romantic. This gave him a high potential for flexibility, which some might call opportunism. Kennedy was more interested in power and in effectiveness than in principle. These tendencies could indeed have led him to pursue the "face-saving" settlement that an equally cynical Nixon and Kissinger sought so unsuccessfully years later. Kennedy might well have scuttled the South Vietnamese once disasters loomed—but only if his domestic flanks were covered.

Of course, the myth of John F. Kennedy began to take shape almost immediately after his assassination, and it has never lost its hold on the nation's consciousness. His ineffectual domestic record and his confrontational foreign policy were quickly subsumed by the image of the shining young prince and the eternal promise of what might have been. On balance this has not been a harmful myth. In some ways, indeed, it has probably been a useful one. The notion that the dead president wanted a strong civil rights bill enabled Lyndon Johnson to push it through an otherwise recalcitrant Congress. The belief that he was intent on ending the cold war helped provide support for some of the arms control efforts of later administrations. The ideal of public service that he inspired by means of the Peace Corps and other institutions has helped to combat the erosion of civic responsibility.

And yet the image of Kennedy as sun-god, or father-leader, has also been pernicious, for it breeds irresponsibility, and it conceals the reality of politics in a miasma of hero worship and a search for conspirators who corrupted the dream. One of the virtues of the scoundrels, the incompetents, and the well-meaning plodders who succeeded Kennedy is that no one could mistake them for charismatic leaders to whom we should surrender our judgment and our will.

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The assassination of John F. Kennedy was too terrible an event, and is now too rooted in the nation's troubled psyche, to be enlisted so casually in the effort to explain the Vietnam War. That war itself was too much an expression of the nation's power, of its self-perceived moment in history, of its social and political structure, to be reduced to a single man's death. Oliver Stone is driven by an obsession to find a meaning for America's tragic obsession with Vietnam. At a time when Hollywood has turned its back on the great issues of race, class, power, and wealth that torment American society—turned its back, in a word, on politics—he is to be commended for addressing the most traumatic political event of our time. But that is precisely why one must regret how much he has weakened his own inquiry and vitiated his own seriousness by explaining the war in Vietnam as our punishment for Kennedy's death. •

The strange new direction of musical criticism.

The Bounds of Music

BY DAVID SCHIFF

Music pervades our lives, but in a compartmentalized way. Roland Barthes divided it ontologically into the music you listen to and the music you play yourself. But what about the music you dance to, the music you drive to, the music you don't consciously listen to (film music), the music you can only listen to alone, the music you remember in spite of yourself (jingles), the music you forget, the music you imagine, "easy" music, "difficult" music? Our music is splintered; and its subcultures and genres interconnect not just in society, but also within us.

That is not least because recordings have become the primary reality of musical experience: we judge live concerts against recordings, not the other way around. Recordings have a greater "aura" than live performances, and often they seem more physical than live performances. And when every home is a concert hall and everyone is an impresario, it becomes confusing to speak of high and low genres of music. Those are distinctions that were based often on the relative prestige of musical venues. But now a string quartet, a jazz performance, a Bulgarian chorus emerge from our speakers, those great levelers, with equal claims to attention and contemplation. Our entire experience of music has changed in ways that undermine the traditional meanings of the terms "work," "performance," "interpretation," even "the musical past." (Analog recordings of avant-garde pieces sound "older" than digital recordings of early music.)

An understanding of the new meanings of these terms is probably the most urgent task facing musical criticism; but it is still fixated on the relics of nineteenth-century musical life: the concert hall, the "great performance," the "standard repertory" of European "classics." And if we turn to academic musicology for a renovated criticism of music, we enter a mine field. Six years ago Joseph Kerman gave a grand overview of the terrain in *Contemplating Music*, and his map of warring subdisciplines looked like Yugoslavia.

Musicologists fretted over scholarly editions of canonical masterworks. Theorists analyzed these works internally and ahistorically. Ethnomusicologists studied music in culture and denied the authority of the European canon and the value-free status of its internal analysis. (Ethnomusicology was often dismissed by the other fields as a Marxisant fringe.) Kerman's utopian solution to this situation was a new kind of music criticism, not the journalistic criticism of Virgil Thomson or Andrew Porter, but something more academic. What music needed, Kerman wrote, were critics who could draw on all the subdisciplines to articulate the ways of musical significance.

Over the past decade a group of young scholars has accepted Kerman's challenge. We are witnessing the emergence of a new musicology. And, as the writings of Lawrence Kramer and Susan McClary in particular demonstrate, the time lag in musical criticism creates strange dislocations. A revolution is occurring in musicology based on ideas that are twenty years old in literary study. Thus notions that seem fresh inside the field may seem stale outside it. Since so much is being imported from other fields, there is a tendency to pursue the obvious, to apply the latest professorial fads mechanically, to hit Beethoven with Foucault and conflate Schenker with Derrida. These "strategies" of academic advancement make some of the new musicology look already a little old.

Still, the academic study of music was certainly ready for an overhaul. For musicologists until recently have defined musical study neatly and narrowly. Music meant not merely European music, but Greater German music. Italian music was a proving ground for German achievements. Everything to the east was "nationalism." French music was a series of variations on the cancan. I am told that a major university department recently rejected a thesis proposal on Ravel and Prokofiev because they were not "serious" composers. Nor has musical study been delimited only geographically. Also off limits were considerations of aesthetics, hermeneutics, and the social history of music. What music is, what it means, and how it engages with society are big, messy, and absolutely crucial subjects that American music departments are sorely ill-equipped to handle.

Musical aesthetics has been a favorite subject of the German philosophical tradition, a tradition alien to Anglo-Saxons. By comparison with the fine dialectical discussion of musical aesthetics by the late German musicologist Carl Dahlhaus, who linked the development of German music with the history of German aesthetic philosophy, the writings of

Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music
by Rose Rosengard Subotnik
(University of Minnesota Press, 372 pp., $16.95 paper)

Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900
by Lawrence Kramer
(University of California Press, 226 pp., $24)

Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality
by Susan McClary
(University of Minnesota Press, 220 pp., $14.95 paper)

Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century
by Carolyn Abbate
(Princeton University Press, 288 pp., $35)

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Leonard Meyer, who was just about the only American to pursue this field, seem limited to a provincial, all-too-American behaviorism. For Dahlhaus, philosophical speculation is inseparable from listening. For Meyer, music is an "experience" determined by the listener's expectations: the listener is a mere auditor, and music a mere succession of frustrations and fulfillments, punishments and rewards.

Hermeneutics was the British specialty. Deryck Cooke, Robert Donington, and Wilfred Mellers show no qualms about stating the meaning of a Beethoven quartet or a Mahler symphony. For them, a Beethoven quartet is self-evidently a search for God. (Mellers's writings can sometimes sound like sermons.) Their interpretive fearlessness is admirable, but it maddens the positivist mind, and their work has not been pursued in this country. Here musical affect has been viewed as a merely subjective matter.

Here, moreover, the essence of music is formal: to the extent that music has a meaning at all, it is contained in the processes revealed through technical analysis. (Musical analysis, often expressed in dauntingly mathematical terms, has become an academic field of its own over the past thirty years, with uneasy relations to musicology.) The notion of the "autonomy" of music, that music should be listened to only for itself, not as a vehicle for extramusical meaning, remains an axiom in American musical studies, notwithstanding its controversial history in musical aesthetics, which Dahlhaus examined critically in *The Idea of Absolute Music.* It is a notion that makes the new musicologists see red.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the scholarly spectrum, the social analysis of music has been no less a pariah of American musicology. Most musicologists entered their field to "validate a cherished canon of works," as Kerman put it. For these traditionalists, the canonical works were the only right and edifying subject. To explore their social context was to risk wasting time on "bad" music, or on uninteresting subjects like the economic conditions of the audience, the political uses of music, the control of the dissemination of music, the legal status of music and its ownership. These issues hardly ever surfaced: everything outside the canonical works was outside the range of study.

This attitude began to look strange by the mid-1970s. The arrival of poststructuralist literary criticism, and the general tendency to view works of art not as autonomous masterpieces but as semiotic "texts" embedded in culture and ideology, began to have its effect even on music departments. And the stranger the old limitations looked, the more appealing became the figure of Theodor W. Adorno, the great political philosopher who studied composition with Berg, hobnobbed with Schoenberg (who privately considered him a dilettante), and was the source for much of the musical discussions in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus.* If you're looking for aesthetics and hermeneutics and cultural sociology, Adorno has it all.

Adorno's writings on music rest on three principles: the notion of what he and Max Horkheimer called "the culture industry"; the historical importance of Schoenberg's atonal compositions; and a theory of "the historical tendency of the materials." All three of these ideas stem more or less from Schoenberg. In 1918 he founded the Society for Private Performance, a concert series for an invited audience that was not allowed to applaud: history alone would judge the music. (Critics were banned.) As Charles Rosen has written, this utopian scheme was really "a solution of despair" that attempted to "withdraw music from the dictates of fashion ... and from the pressures of commercialism."

And yet the Society was itself, unwittingly and ironically, a form of "surrender to commercialism," since it honored, however negatively, the power of the "culture industry," those inescapable forces that shape, package, distribute, and sell the commodity called music. Such a surrender, of course, was inevitable. Imagine music today without ASCAP, BMI, Juilliard, Columbia Artists Management, Sony, DGG, the Board of Lincoln Center, the NEA, PBS, and so on, and you can see just how essential is the culture industry, and just how distorting to musicological discussion is the omission of it. In much of Adorno's writings, however, the culture industry is not so much examined as execrated.

Schoenberg also insisted that musical themes carried obligations. They demanded to be completely worked through, using the technique of developing variation, which replaced repetition with elaboration. (The second movement of Brahms's Second Symphony exemplified the technique.) Adorno combined this idea of obligation with Schoenberg's move away from tonality to arrive at a historical hermeneutics, according to which the formal processes of music were the basis of a representation of ideology. In Adorno's account, when Schoenberg worked out the consequences of his material and pushed music beyond tonality, he was working out the social crisis that led from bourgeois liberalism to fascism.

Rose Rosengard Subotnik has been Adorno's lone advocate in musicology for nearly twenty years, a position that has left her feeling like a voice crying in the wilderness. Alienated from the limited interests and the positivist methods of academic musicology, and finding herself preoccupied with issues of epistemology that her colleagues found baffling, she "grabbed on to [Adorno's writings] as if they were a lifeline." But her use for Adorno has been limited and personal. Read chronologically, the essays in *Developing Variations* reveal a gradual distancing from her master. She begins as his defender and his explicator, but gradually she stands him on his head.

Strangely missing from her version of Adorno are the analysis of the culture industry, which is replaced by a generalized concern for social issues, and the music of Schoenberg, which was the linchpin of Adorno's political and theoretical analysis of music in the twentieth century. Subotnik identifies with Schoenberg "as a person," but her taste in music is for the standard works of the nineteenth century, for Beethoven and Chopin. Despite her anger at the limitations of academic musicology, then, she appears to accept the traditional view of the field as the study of cherished masterpieces. But she gives this stance a novel twist, by turning pre-modernism into anti-modernism.

Subotnik's Adorno without Schoenberg is a bit like Plato without Socrates, but it makes explicit an anti-modernist subtext in Adorno's work that was at odds with his championing of the avant-garde. In the course of her book, Subotnik gradually arrives at a rejection of modernism and its sacralization of art. Like T.J. Clark in the history of the visual arts and Terry Eagleton in the history of literature, she places the modernist turn all the way back in the nineteenth century: it was then that art was first removed from social involvement and raised into the realm of the aesthetic, thereby depriving art of its political force. Subotnik plausibly finds this first modernist move in the late music of Beethoven and in Chopin. (I might go even further back, to C. P. E. Bach.)

Her view of modernism is a resurrection of the left's ancient distrust of art for art's sake. It is also much simpler than Adorno's own view. For Adorno, certain works of modernism, especially those of Schoenberg's atonal period, transcended the categories of the practical and the aesthetic through a revolu-

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tionary negation; they became anti-texts that dismantled the aesthetic realm by exploding traditional forms. For Subotnik, by contrast, these works are merely a dead end. To argue her point, she makes use of Adorno's notion of the "historical tendency of the materials," but in reverse. She claims that the classical style of Haydn and Mozart was written in an idiom "which has come closer than any other Western style to providing the basis for a coincidence between purely musical meanings intended by the individual composer, and those understood by the public at large." (Subotnik is not particularly interested in determining who exactly was the "public at large" of Vienna in 1790.)

Beethoven "problematized" this coincidence (such is her language) through the rhetorical emphasis of his second period, as in the "Eroica" Symphony or the "Appasionata" Sonata, and abandoned it in the eccentric works of the third period, in the late sonatas, the late quartets, and the *Missa Solemnis*. With Chopin, finally, eccentric "contingency" became a stylistic category representing an autonomous aesthetic realm. Chopin's music, Subotnik claims, no longer coincides with the public's understanding: "its individualities seem explicitly contingent." Chopin cultivated an idiosyncratic style that, in calling attention to its own oddities, denied the universal categories of perception, which, for Subotnik, link the classical style of Haydn and Mozart to the philosophy of Kant.

Subotnik rather confusingly associates this swing from a universal language to a personal style with the collapse of Kantian epistemology. At first she appears to approve of what she calls Chopin's "post-Kantian critique of the autonomous semiotic universe idealized in classicism" as a rebellion against an oppressive system of expression: contingency serves as the enemy of the autonomy of art. Yet she is finally uncomfortable with Chopin's "fragmented, essentially aesthetic view of human reality," because it, too, turns into yet another version of musical autonomy, the one known as modernism.

Devoid of any universally understood syntax, and thus understandable only in isolation, modernist music (Schoenberg's most purely) took the increase of "contingency" to an extreme. Indeed, modernist music refined itself out of any possibility of communicating meaning at all, producing only "formally self-conscious but expressively impotent works." And so it was that by 1986 this disciple of Adorno (who wrote that "popular music is bad, bound to be bad, without exception") was urging contemporary composers, for the sake of transparency of meaning, to emulate Bruce Springsteen and Talking Heads.

The problems with Subotnik's style of argument are legion. For a start, it is a historical account utterly uninterested in the empirical evidence of history. (Adorno, too, grandly dismissed any notion of empirical evidence.) And what sounds like critical history is itself an ideological parable, in which the "music of Beethoven" functions as an allegorical figure, Bourgeois Liberalism With Clean Hands. But which "music," and which "public," and whose "intended meaning" (whatever that means), and when, and how? As soon as we ask such concrete questions, Subotnik's argument collapses.

Subotnik suffers in the comparison to Adorno not only in her similarities, but also in her differences. In returning to him from her, I find that just as poetry is what is lost in the translation, philosophy is what is lost in the explanation. There was violence in Adorno's harangues, but it was the heart of his argument: he was a Jeremiah of Mitteleuropa. Robbed of their moral passion and wild dialectical about-faces, however, his arguments are merely philistine. Subotnik has her own passionate voice, but it is off-putting and tiresome. She is angry not just with musicology, but with music itself, which has let us all down by failing to connect with the larger issues of society. By sealing themselves off into the professionalisms of the university and the concert hall, musicologists and musicians signed their own death warrants.

The "death of music" theme is sounded with alarming frequency these days. But is it really true? Subotnik seems woefully limited in her knowledge of contemporary music. She is so blinkered by the academic "new music" scene (a short-lived phenomenon that *has* been dead for at least fifteen years), as well as by the nineteenth-century repertory, that she seems largely unaware of developments that have for some time now created a surprisingly accessible contemporary repertory. Whatever one thinks of the music of John Adams, John Corigliano, Philip Glass, Robin Holloway, Meredith Monk, Steve Reich, John Zorn, or Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, their music is neither hermetic nor obscure. Subotnik's cultural pessimism reminds me a little of a friend's observation that a lot of people think that Western civilization collapsed the year they left college.

Subotnik's anger is tiresome because it is the expression of a conservative and hidebound musical culture; and in this regard she is very much a creature of the old musicology. Her repeated attacks on "autonomy," launched in her writings of the 1960s and 1970s, do make her prophetic of younger writers on music, but she fails to see that in clinging to Adorno's attitude toward the "materials," she herself is perpetrating formalism. Adorno's insistence on deriving the meaning of music only from its inner construction, his social analysis of the art from the inside out rather than from the outside in, his contempt for the merely empirical, all make a concrete consideration of the cultural context impossible. Turn from Subotnik's account of Chopin's A minor Prelude to Lawrence Kramer's in *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900*, and you will find a more nuanced account of the cultural setting (if not quite an engagement with the empirical world).

An English professor and a composer who has become an honorary musicologist through his work on literature and music, Kramer sets out to apply the tools of literary theory, "poststructuralism and what might be called a critical or nonidealizing historicism," to the familiar canon of nineteenth-century music. In practice, this means a much overdue and very suggestive reading of Romantic music within the broader setting of Romanticism as it has been decoded by literary theorists, and a somewhat less convincing analysis of representations of sexuality and gender.

Subotnik "grounds" Chopin through a highly abstracted version of Adorno's historical tendency method. Kramer, by contrast, surrounds the Chopin piece with a collage of texts: Gide, Keats, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Kafka, Gericault, Goethe, and Manet's *Olympia* (an overworked woman, these days). These texts give the Chopin piece (and each other) a really fresh reading. Gericault's *Study of Dissected Limbs*—a painting of two severed legs, covered by an arm "positioned so that it gives an uncanny impression of embracing, caressing, the legs"—will henceforth come into my mind's eye whenever I play the piece.

Kramer glues his assemblage of sources together with Lacanian patter ("impossible objects are products of an epistemological/topographic discourse in which human subjectivity ceases to be a common field and becomes, instead, a secret recess"). In plainer talk, Kramer considers Chopin's music to portray a new sense of the self, cut off from shared experience. The A minor Prelude, like the other texts that surround it, is a "projected fragment of the subject's incoherence... stabilized—or at least constrained—by the trope of embodiment." As a final touch, Kramer sees the pre-

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lude as an image of Chopin's diseased body, though this amounts to a rather surprising reversion to the old biographical criticism of James Huneker: Chopin in Mallorca and all those raindrops.

Like Subotnik, however, Kramer falls back on the formalism of the old musicology. His account of Romanticism is vitiated by a strange and anachronistic argument that the Chopin prelude is problematic because it cannot be explained with the tools of modern harmonic analysis. (Both writers feel obliged to make detours into formal analysis, with little to show for their efforts.) And his engagement with the empirical is limited in other ways, too. Repair to Dahlhaus's discussion of "poetic music" and its relation to Parisian salon culture, which locates the precise social and literary setting of the genre with breathtaking precision, and Kramer's notion of culture melts into the postmodernist air.

The unanalyzable quality of the Chopin prelude makes it "contingent" for Subotnik and "impossible" for Kramer. But surely the piece is more of an enigma to us than it was to Chopin's contemporaries, who recognized a work of eccentric genius when they heard one and could care less about analysis. Inspired freakish pieces like this one, in fact, were what set Chopin above Mendelssohn. Formalism is our problem, not the nineteenth century's. And neither Subotnik nor Kramer notices how carefully Chopin frames his eccentricities within conventional gestures: the music itself establishes a dialogue between the weird and the normal, the "genius" of the composer and the milieu of the listener.

Kramer's musicological interest in the body broaches another trendy predilection of the new musicology. These days, if there still is a mind-body problem, the body is winning: it is virtually our favorite subject. And so a huge amount of contemporary cultural criticism has set out to reveal the hidden gender meanings and sexual codes of nineteenth-century works of art. Often the critics find exactly what they are looking for: male "hegemony." At least Kramer, in his essay on "Musical Form and Fin de Siècle Sexuality," finds something different. In *Tristan and Isolde*, he detects a "mobility of gender," which makes it a "radical work not only in its musical procedures but in its sexual ideology." Tristan and Isolde, he explains, seem undifferentiated in terms of gender: "If we forget the pronouns, the dialogues between the lovers could be reversed, or exchanged between persons of the same sex, without making any appreciable difference."

Of course, people have been saying this about *Tristan* for 100 years. Isolde and Brünnhilde were seen as "new women" in the Ibsen-Shaw model, while Tristan became a model of self-conscious male passivity, hardly a tribune of "male hegemony." No, Wagner's sexually radical work was not *Tristan*, it was *Parsifal*, a statement of absolute gender immobility and sexual disgust that provided a model for male bonding that was imitated in the best men's clubs of London. All of which is to say that cultural history cannot be done in hit-and-run fashion. Sexuality in Wagner or Manet or Henry James or George Eliot is a very elusive thing.

But such difficulties do not deter Susan McClary. Her essay "Sexual Politics in Classical Music," in her book *Feminine Endings*, exemplifies the dangers of facile "gendering." For McClary, *Carmen* is significant for embodying all the evils of European imperialism: racism, sexism, colonialism, the fear of the body. In short, it was written by Don José. He may be the hero of the opera, but he is a villain of the culture. To be sure, *Carmen* contains all the odious elements that McClary names; but it hardly hides them. Surely it treats Don José even more mercilessly than it does Carmen. Some hero! He is the most painful mama's boy in the history of opera.

McClary sees the relative strength of Carmen's music compared with Don José's as evidence that the opera is a "paranoid fantasy." But whose paranoia? Don José's or McClary's? It is odd, since she is a great celebrator of performance art as a feminine form, that McClary fails to see that opera is performance art, and one in which female performers do not merely "enact" a male drama, but essentially rewrite it in performance. However the score and the libretto appear on the page, in the theater it is Carmen, or rather the woman who portrays Carmen, who controls the show. For McClary, however, the issues are clear: "One of the opera's central themes involves the necessity for white bourgeois codes of behavior (as exemplified by Micaela) to reign supreme in the face of the apparently more permissive, more sinister lifestyles of the 'darker races.'" This is a glib and superficial reading. The truth is the opposite: despite its creation in a politically unenlightened era, *Carmen* offers among other things a trenchant and subversive (and entertaining) critique of the white European male. And this is hardly news.

Next McClary turns to Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony (her account of the musical influence of Bizet on Tchaikovsky suggests that her ear for musical style is more subtle than her rendering of gender ideology), and in its second theme she finds evidence of unconscious misogyny: "Sultry, seductive, and slinky ... unlike the goal-oriented protagonist, this theme manages to be both utterly static (even stagnant) and also irrational." McClary tallies up Tchaikovsky's sins against womankind by fitting out the old approach of programmatic analysis with all the latest terminology: "As the protagonist lies in helpless exhaustion, the sluttish second theme re-enters—in the key of the raised submediant rather than under the hegemony of the protagonist's tonic, as convention would

The Wanderer's New Life

I have wept longer than becomes a man.
My face in the river shows me these
three days' vigil in grim remonstrance—
eyes red, beard beginning, I'm Narcissus'
ugly brother, the one who traveled as far
from water as he could. She's dead to me.
That much I knew when she slipped from my arms
to listen for the cries of the hunter.
And I must die in this muddy river.
One more time I will summon her, that
they may say of me I loved her to the last.
The miller's daughter, let me remember...
a girl who shone, whose eyes slew devils,
who loved me briefly. But suddenly
the maid of the mill is laughable; I see her
pinched-up eyes inspecting the hunter's
clothing, I see them coupling in a haystack far
from her father, and I cannot drown. It is the maid
I loved who's dead; I am free to go. No longer
will I throw my heart into songs that
send her heavenward; I will sing of snow,
of fish, of other things. My faded
miller's slut, I whisper into your ears
this final time the fact that will
reduce you to whorish nothings:
hunters cannot rhyme. The lindens
will be my loves from this day forward,
the river, my goddess; with washed eyes
I will rise from this sluggish bed
where late I moaned and cried. And wander!

RACHEL WETZSTEON

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demand—and toys with him, finally depleting him." But finally McClary excuses Tchaikovsky's political incorrectness: he was, after all, a homosexual, "a man who was tormented by his situation within his homophobic society."

Gay artists of the past are sitting ducks for such progressive special pleading, as if Tchaikovsky needed any. To support her argument that male gender codes are totalitarian in their oppressiveness, McClary must transform Tchaikovsky into a helpless victim. This attitude is not only condescending, it is also, like McClary's ideas about women composers, sexually reductive and crudely essentialist: this man wrote this kind of music because he was homosexual. But what about Tchaikovsky's contemporaries? Bruckner spent half the year in a monastery, and as soon as he got out he fell in love with the first 18-year-old girl he saw. Brahms, some evidence suggests, could perform sexually only with prostitutes. How, exactly, does their music reflect these "facts"?

The slipshod quality of McClary's criticism may be the price she pays for her sweeping ambition. She has mapped out the field of feminist musical study and become its principal ideologue and polemicist. She sees feminist musicology as the study of the "musical construction of gender and sexuality," the "gendered aspects of traditional musical theory," the role of "gender and sexuality in musical narrative," "music as a gendered discourse," and the "discursive strategies of women musicians." McClary shows her best talent in discussing contemporary music: she is the only one of these four writers with a lively sense of the current scene, with its erosion of the boundaries between classical, vanguard, and pop genres, and her essays on Janika Vandervelde, Laurie Anderson, and Madonna (why no mention of Meredith Monk?) show that she is a persuasive advocate of the music that she likes. The great flaw in her work is not precisely feminism, which is a point of view that male-dominated musical study sometimes needs. Nor is it the idea, hardly novel, that music, like all cultural artifacts, encodes sexual stereotypes, which is a rather uncontroversial proposition. What mars McClary's analysis is the easy assumption that when it comes to gender, the late twentieth century has all the answers.

Despite her avowed radicalism, moreover, McClary oddly collaborates in her choice of subjects and methods with the musicological traditions that she rejects. Like most musicologists, she assumes that the history of music is the history of composition. In emphasizing musical composition as the focus of study, however, musicology, McClary's included, has in effect ruled women out of the history of music.

Until recently, of course, women have played very little part in composition. (The fact that Ellen Taaffe Zwilich was commissioned to write not one but two *trombone* concertos for the Chicago Symphony shows how decisively the old gender barriers have now fallen.) But women have long played a great role in performance, patronage, and pedagogy. Imagine twentieth-century music without Wanda Landowska, Nadia Boulanger, the Princesse de Polignac, Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge and Betty Freeman, Rosina Lhevinne and Dorothy DeLay. If performers were given their rightful place in the history of music, it could easily be shown that Callas exerted a far greater influence on the course of opera in the past forty years than any composer did. Might not feminist musicology profitably shift the focus away from a male-controlled cultural product to a female-centered cultural process, and celebrate these areas of real feminine dominance? Our notion of music would be appropriately challenged and enriched.

Carolyn Abbate's *Unsung Voices*, although it may appear to be the most obscure of these books, is the most powerful of them. Its unpromising point of departure, the idea of voice, "not literally vocal performance, but rather a sense of certain isolated and rare gestures in music, whether vocal or nonvocal, that may be perceived as modes of subjects' enunciations," is an extension and a criticism of Edward Cone's notion of a "composer's voice" that informs musical narrative. In his book *The Composer's Voice*, Cone posed a fine question: If music is a language, who is speaking? And he proposed an answer: the composer. He analyzed Mozart's operas and Schubert's songs to show how the music—and thus, presumably, the composer—comments on the words spoken by the characters. Abbate gives Cone's idea a Barthesian spin: the voice in music is not the composer's, it is the "physical force" of the music itself.

Thus she establishes a critical dialogue between music's desire to convey narrative information and its sensual resistance to such signification. She tests out her notion on two unlikely and unchic pieces, the Bell Song from *Lakmé*, which enacts "in pure form familiar Western tropes on the suspicious power of music and its capacity to move us without rational speech," and the *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, "a 'laboratorical' work, a place for experiments in interpreting musical narration." These are pieces that only a true music-lover could love, but Abbate cannily uses them for a skeptical re-evaluation of the ways in which music and verbal meaning are linked and confused, not only in the older notions of program music, but in the recent work of musical "narratologists" inspired by literary theory. She shows that these works, rather than fusing music and storytelling, emphasize the divide between music and narrative form.

These concerns lead naturally to opera, and by the time that Abbate gets to her two chapters on *The Ring*, her unexpected twists of thought and her sharp musical instincts find their perfect subject. Abbate is the most original writer on Wagner to appear since Dahlhaus, certainly the first writer to leave the usual biographical and political controversies behind. Her essay "Brünnhilde Walks By Night" is a tour de force of imaginative interpretation that redeems the awkward premise and the bumpy mechanism of the book, and gives us a new vision of an opera that is usually seen as a heap of confused intentions.

Wagner wrote the poem of *Götterdämmerung* in 1848, but he completed the music in 1874. The revolutionary social vision of the early libretto gave way a quarter century later to a quasi-religious passivity. In this final opera of the cycle, the musical materials of the earlier operas appear in a state of extremely sophisticated development, but there remain disturbing traces of creaky, grand opera conventions: drinking songs, oaths, vengeance duets. Shaw suggested that the listener should simply give up the attempt to make sense of it, that in *Götterdämmerung* Wagner had blundered. Abbate, however, places the consciousness of Wagner's blunder inside the work. More precisely, she locates it in the character of Brünnhilde, whose laughter at Siegfried's death shows a "capacity for perceiving meanings that others cannot." And this capacity finally permits her to "doubt narration—even (or especially) the master-narration that comes to her through her sybilline ear." Without explicitly saying so, Abbate's reading is scandalously feminist. Brünnhilde, or rather her "voice," becomes the heroic queen—the heroic critic—of the entire *Ring*.

Has music found the sort of musicologist-critic that Kerman rightly insisted it needs? One can imagine a critic combining Subotnik's moral earnestness, Kramer's command of several disciplines, McClary's racy sense of

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the contemporary, and Abbate's interpretive originality. Now there would be a critic—almost. For these writers all share a significant failing: when it comes time to talk about the music itself, about just the notes, their writing becomes congested, unilluminating, unreadable. No, I am not eager for a return to the old formalism. But writing about music must be able to convey also its texture and its flavor, what Barthes called its "grain." That is notoriously hard to do, and it requires, along with other things, a genuine formal competence—which may be why it has usually been done by composers, by Berlioz, Schumann, Debussy, Thomson.

And the new musicologists seem to share another failing, too. No doubt the fractured nature of musical study itself, which divides practitioners from scholars, splits scholars into subdisciplines, and ghettoizes musical cultures and genres, is an important part of what prevents musical criticism from achieving its complicated task. The first step, surely, is to knock down the old barriers; and this these younger musicologists have done *con brio*. But finally the real challenges to a fresh understanding of music lie beyond the ivy-covered walls and the passing fads of academic discourse. If they are really serious about seeing music not as an autonomous form, but as a social and ideological force, the new musicologists must learn to speak not just of, but to, the wider world. •

Revel Without a Cause

BY PAUL STARR

The Flight from Truth:
The Reign of Deceit in the Age of Information
by Jean-François Revel
translated by Curtis Cate

(Random House, 387 pp., $25)

Jean-François Revel loves democratic society with a supreme contempt. In 1983, in *How Democracies Perish*, he warned apocalyptically that liberal democracy was on the verge of extinction as a result of the combined attack of external and internal enemies. The external enemy was communism; the internal enemy, an "industry of blame" that played into Communist hands by relentlessly criticizing the democracies. Hopelessly guilt-ridden, gullible, and cowardly, liberal democracy was proving no match in international politics for predatory Communist regimes unbothered by doubts or internal criticism. Poor democracy, it would turn out to be a mere "accident of history." So naive, so easily outwitted, so easily deceived, how worthy of contempt by a visionary with a true grasp of the realities of power!

The Flight from Truth continues Revel's crusade against the internal enemy weakening the West from within: the journalists, the intellectuals, the religious leaders, the textbook writers, and the teachers who continue, in his eyes, to denounce democratic capitalism one-sidedly, with the ultimate purpose of providing an alibi for the failures of totalitarian communism and Third World socialism. Originally published in France in 1988 as *La connaissance inutile*, the book now appears with a new introduction to the English-language edition. A great deal has changed since Revel's 1983 book, but not the analysis of communism that he presents here. In his introduction he defends once more the argument that, despite its failures and apparent breakdown, communism displays an "exceptional longevity." "Aren't we dealing, in the case of communism, with societies of a radically new type, in which so far we have never in fact observed a complete change of regime?"

These lines, written in the summer of 1989, have been left strangely unrevised in a book with a publication date of 1992. Rarely has history, in the interval between a manuscript and a book, been so good to mankind and so cruel to an author. It is scarcely an intellectual crime, of course, to have missed the fall of Soviet communism in advance. Still, to have missed it while it was happening, and even after it happened, is a special achievement. Revel's belief in the Soviets' superior political capacities, his steadfast insistence that communism was irreversible, his conviction even as Communist regimes were breaking down and breaking up that they had diabolical recuperative powers, must go down as one of the most resolute blunders of political analysis in our time.

Like some other analysts who were anxious to preserve maximum feasible inflexibility in our relations with the Soviets, Revel took the theoretical, "ideal type" model of totalitarianism developed by postwar political scientists to be the reality of Soviet society, as if the Communist state achieved so total a domination of society that no change was possible. In its heyday, the Soviet leadership certainly did seek total domination; but it is now clear that its penetration of civil life and personal belief, even its command of its own higher echelons, was nowhere near complete. In recent decades, far from being totally penetrated by the state, Communist societies, particularly in Eastern Europe, had become hollow, devoid of faith or legitimacy. In the Soviet Union itself, civil society was showing signs of vitality even in the Brezhnev years, as the historian Frederick Starr wrote in articles in the 1980s.

Revel, however, was politically incapable of recognizing the significance of these tendencies, for he took any suggestion that Communist regimes were changing or could be changed internally as naive daydreaming or deceitful propaganda aimed at undermining Western resolve and defenses. In his new introduction to *The Flight from Truth*, he offers an ingenious defense for his mistaken prediction of growing totalitarian world domination. Some other books and utterances, he notes, are said to be self-fulfilling prophecies. "The ambition of my own is that they should prove to be self-destroying prophecies."

In other words, his earlier, erroneous forecast that democracy would collapse was meant only as a "self-destroying" incitement. Of course, those who write with self-destroying intentions cannot be disproved. If their predictions turn out to be true, were they not clairvoyant? And if their predictions turn out to be false, did they not contribute positively to that result? Revel has some harsh words about the "culture of evasion" as practiced by the left, but his own contribution to that culture is not a small one.

Yet the problem with Revel's analysis, in his earlier book and this one, is much more serious than simply a wrong prediction, or even a failure to own up to a mistake. His view that Soviet communism was strong because of its monolithic structure of power, and that liberal democracy is weak because of internal criticism, represents a fundamentally mistaken view of state power. Curiously enough, it is the same error that was made by the opponents of liberal

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democracy in the 1930s who doubted that it could stand up to fascism. In fact, liberal states are surprisingly stronger than their detractors suppose. As Stephen Holmes has recently pointed out, the classic political liberals admired eighteenth-century England precisely because of its power. Voltaire and Montesquieu, Holmes noted, argued that oppression

> weakens a state. Intolerance deepens sectarian conflicts and drives useful citizens abroad. Censorship blocks the flow of information vital for the governance of a large nation.... A liberal polity is much better situated than a tyrannical one for enlisting citizen cooperation in the pursuit of common objectives.

The history of our time offers vivid evidence that they were right. If only Revel, who professes devotion to liberal democracy, had more confidence that it works.

Even more seriously, Revel gravely misrepresents the predominant currents of liberal and social democratic criticism. He is continually taking criticism of policies to mean hostility to democracy itself. Almost casually he broadcasts charges of intellectual treason. Thus he accuses American scientists who raised doubts about the feasibility of the Strategic Defense Initiative of twisting the truth for political reasons and then writes, "U.S. intellectuals, above all university teachers, are much farther to the left than the country in general, at any rate if being 'to the left' consists of wanting to offer strategic superiority to totalitarian regimes."

And later, speaking of the critical role of the Western press, he writes:

> In a democracy, to attack one's government without respite when it is defending itself against the encroachments of a totalitarian and imperialist power is not to play the role of counterpower; it is, on the contrary, to go over and join the camp of the strongest power.

In Revel's world, there are no honest differences of opinion. The scientists who oppose SDI are never legitimately concerned about its costs and its risks; they wish "to offer strategic superiority to totalitarian regimes." They are "internal" enemies, sympathizers with the great external enemy or its foolish instruments. To be sure, some opposition to weapons development has been ideological. But if the critics of current policy are really enemy sympathizers or dupes, it makes any genuine political debate pointless. How can one debate national defense with enemy agents?

That, in a nutshell, is the reason that Revel's frame of mind is so antithetical to the actual practice of democracy. Much of Revel's analysis of particular controversies in *The Flight from Truth* is serious and trenchant; on many issues, particularly his analysis of Third Worldism and the failures of socialism, I share his position. He is exactly right, for example, about "selective antiracism." Many who have vigorously protested South African racism have failed to respond to bloody crimes against tribal and ethnic minorities, sometimes genocidal in scope, that have been committed by allegedly progressive regimes in Africa and elsewhere, whose leaders have been well received, even honored, in the West. And while blaming capitalism and imperialism for world hunger, some on the left have failed to acknowledge that socialist development policies have all too often caused food shortages in countries that might otherwise be free of famine. Still, even when he makes a legitimate point, Revel cannot resist overdoing it, saying that "*only* in Communist lands or in countries close to Marxist socialism do food catastrophes still occur on a medieval scale." The recent study by Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, shows that this is simply not so.

The history of intellectual apology for totalitarian regimes is a long book of shame, and there is nothing wrong with denouncing that record in the most caustic terms. But Revel's Manichaean framework, his frequent misrepresentations of opposing positions as if liberals and socialists in the West generally defended totalitarianism, and his lack of any semblance of balance make him the sort of publicist that no one should want to have as an ally.

For Revel, truth now belongs to the right. Indeed, the idea that both the left and the right are sometimes wrong or deceitful is itself a lie that the left has propagated. He writes that "intellectual dishonesty has by and large become a province of the Left. It is not that the Right no longer wishes to employ it; it is simply that it has lost the talent for doing so." In this respect, I have more confidence in right-wing talent than does Revel; apparently he has not yet made the acquaintance of some of our Republican campaign specialists. Perhaps Revel is unacquainted with right-wing intellectual dishonesty in the way that the fish in the rabbi's parable is unacquainted with water—because he has been swimming in it too long himself.

Curiously, although Revel devotes the bulk of this book—and bulky it is—to trouncing the journalists and the intellectuals of the left, he has higher ambitions. *The Flight from Truth* is supposed to be about why "Man," in this age of information, is so little guided by intelligence, a sorrowful fact that leads Revel into much lugubrious reflection about human folly. In these passages, unfortunately, Revel's reach exceeds his grasp. "When he has a choice," Revel writes, "Man is today neither more nor less rational and honest than he was in epochs designated as pre-scientific." After many pages, Revel concludes that intellectuals are disappointingly like everyone else in their use of information and lack of integrity. The media are not scientific in their respect for evidence. Scientists themselves are often simplistic outside their areas of technical knowledge. These are not exactly revelations. Personally, I prefer to read Revel when he is really vicious. At least then he scores some telling blows against boredom, and occasionally against his adversaries.

Coming from French intellectual life—and when neoconservatives say that "it's still a dangerous world," that must be one region they have in mind—Revel may carry with him more than scars from the now thankfully finished battle of the many Marxisms. He carries with him also a sense of the ever impending crisis—now a crisis of truth and culture, rather than of economics or class struggle. We are still, it turns out, on the edge of apocalypse, we are still preyed upon by deceivers, and those who say otherwise betray their real interests! Yet this fever, too, must subside. The war of left and right, at least as we have known it in this century, is slipping into the past. New forces, some of them hostile to liberal civilization, are being born in the wreckage of communism. The political maps, like the geographic ones, will need to be redrawn. And to find our way, we will need guides who understand how deeply the world has changed.

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Blues and the Concrete Truth

BY ALEXANDER STAR

The Spyglass Tree by Albert Murray

(Pantheon, 207 pp., $21)

The common expectation that powerlessness and poverty rob a people of their culture has troubled many black intellectuals, for whom the riches of black culture seem an obvious and extremely empirical fact. Long ago, W. E. B. DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk* catalogued the exuberant eloquence and the quiet determination that mark so much of black folklore. And in recent years scholarly studies of slavery have emphasized the ingenuity with which slaves manipulated ordinary rituals, daily conversation and song, in order to manage and sometimes to challenge their condition. It is such traditions-in-adversity that contributed to the tremendous artistic achievements of urban black culture in the early decades of this century.

Still, one man's heroic culture of resistance may be another man's enfeebling "culture of poverty." Black culture in America labors beneath the weight of special anxieties. How is it possible to separate a culture's symptoms of hardship from its means of sustenance and joy? Can the requirements of morale be separated from the demands of art? Considering the competing claims of squalor and style in 1961, Ralph Ellison worried that "many Negroes have been trying to define their own predicament in exclusively sociological terms," with the result that "much of what makes us a source of strength to America goes unappreciated and undefined." In the years since, black writers have often taken Ellison's cue, turning from the exposure of misery and injustice to the task of creating, in Michele Wallace's words, an "imagination through which the seeming chaos, brutality, and sensualism of the black community will not only make sense but also generate its own aesthetic and spiritual possibilities." The challenge, in such a view, is to resist the temptation to overwhelm the spirit with historical pathos, to refuse to reduce art even to the great theme of triumph over adversity.

This notion, that historical reports and sociological surveys distort the meaning of black experience by diminishing or rendering altogether invisible the cultural resources of black Americans, has guided the work of the writer Albert Murray, Ellison's fellow student and friend, for some twenty-five years. Murray was born in 1916. He belongs to the same generation of black writers as Ellison and Baldwin, though he did not begin to publish regularly until the mid-'60s. A graduate of the Tuskegee Institute, he flew during World War II with the Tuskegee Airmen, a celebrated squadron of black pilots, then returned south to teach English and drama at his alma mater. Since the 1950s, he has for the most part made his home in Harlem, writing about music and race, and exerting a powerful influence on many writers, artists, and musicians in the city with his conversation and his prose. Murray, who co-authored Count Basie's autobiography, is equally at ease with Joyce and jazz. Duke Ellington once called him "the unsquarest person I know."

In his remarkable polemical essays of the 1960s collected in *The Omni-Americans*, Murray excoriated the "folklore of white supremacy" that he found encoded in the work of social science "image-technicians" such as "Big Daddy Moynihan," for whom "white norms and black deviations" were "tantamount to white well-being and black pathology." Murray brusquely lampooned "experts" who imposed foolish models of self-hatred on an often proud and snobbish people, failed to recognize their own theories when they were dutifully fed back to them by their subjects, and most of all smothered a "dramatic sense of life" in abstractions and categories. Sociologists, in Murray's view, were blind to human dispositions, attitudes, and feelings—and to how they combine to form a particular "sense of life."

Like many critics of the Moynihan Report, Murray underestimated the disabling effects of family breakdown, wrongly assuming that the larger family-unit of the "neighborhood" could fill in where parents failed. He did not recognize that neighborhoods, too, were beginning to fail. But Murray's main concern was not so much the particulars of social policy as it was a growing voyeuristic fascination with degradation. He wanted to shift the grounds of the debate toward a larger understanding that did not confuse "the plight of Harlem" with "life in Harlem" or ignore the "possibilities that are also there" in bad times.

In his celebration of the "sidewalk conviviality," easy convenience, and brownstone beauty of Harlem, Murray was at pains to challenge both the conservative insistence on austerity and self-discipline and the liberal view of black life as a "problem" to be solved with "condescending benevolence." He was an early and principled refuser of the sacred role of victim. Protesting sociological reductivism, or worse, martyrological reductivism, that saw only sorrow and suffering in black experience, Murray insisted on "suggesting some of the affirmative implications" of black life. For, "poverty and injustice notwithstanding," blacks "live with gusto and a sense of elegance that have always been downright enviable."

Murray's disputatious essays had another target, too: black nationalists and radicals, who were unable to grasp the "composite" and "plural" character of American society. Murray has been an important voice against separatism. Emphasizing the historical importance of miscegenation, that "white people are not really white nor black people black," he showed that the lines of cultural influence are just as tangled up between black and white as the lines of blood. He rejected the urge to identify exclusively with the African past, arguing that blacks, too, for all the pain they suffered here, have benefitted from the American ethos. For Murray, it is a kind of moral and cultural axiom that America is a part of its blacks and they are a part of America. Far from being exiles or outsiders, blacks are "omni-americans," because they have been on these shores as long as whites, seen as much of American experience, and identified as closely with American values throughout.

Many historians have pondered the influence of slavery on the formation of American ideals. Murray looked to the other side of the story. He wrote of the influence of American ideals on the reality of slavery, tartly arguing, without prettifying the past, that slaves in the South lived "in the presence of more human freedom and individual opportunity than they or anybody else have ever seen before," and that sooner or later this freedom and opportunity

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shaped their culture. The fugitive-slave hero, for instance, was a distinctly American archetype, and a figure impossible to imagine in an African context.

Insisting on an affirmative view of black life, Murray opposed the simplistic rhetoric of racial pride that proliferated in the late 1960s. He warned "how easy it is for self-pride to degenerate into self-inflation, empty arrogance, and chauvinism." The problem is not simply to proclaim that "black is beautiful" and disparage one's less defiant elders, but to attend carefully to the already present sources of strength and beauty in black experience.

Murray also hoped to see the reorientation of black politics from protest to practicalities, from gratifying symbols of power to real achievements, from "signifying" to "qualifying." Indeed, his resistance to the portraits of "black pathology" that he found in works such as Kenneth Clark's *Dark Ghetto* was motivated partly by practical considerations. "The black ideologists of welfare appropriations," he wrote, " ... do not realize that their one-sided featuring of black pathology" is less likely to win "white sympathy for black grievances" than to make whites understandably fearful of desegregation. In Mobile, Alabama, by contrast, Murray found blacks going about the business of gaining political and economic power patiently and effectively, casting a mocking glance on the charged rhetoric and the senseless violence of their Northern compatriots. Recording voices from the streets and barbershops, Murray overhears one Alabaman, weary of the symbolic politics of race, comment, "color ain't what Rockafeller is proud of."

As the screams of the '60s quieted to whispers of "benign neglect," Murray turned increasingly from the diagnosis of politics to the elucidation of art. Wishing to examine a primarily oral and musical culture in literary terms, he proposed a comprehensive interpretation of black life, an interpretation of what he called the "blues idiom." Enshrined in anthologies of American literature and record company catalogs, absorbed into almost every current genre of popular music, and studied by schools of musicology and folklore, the blues have long generated wide-ranging theories of American culture; but most bluesological ventures break down around the same unresolved questions. Are the blues primarily a state of mind, or a musical or verbal form? A wail of despair, or an effort to confront and to transcend despair? The authentic voice of the folk, or commercialized entertainment peddled to the masses? Most of all, there lingers the old saw raised most recently by Studs Terkel in *The New York Times*: "Can a white man really understand a black man's blues?" (Treating other white blues fans with skepticism and irritation, Terkel has no doubt that he himself has "understood the blues" since the 1950s.)

For Murray, the blues, before they are anything else, are a way to be: an ethic, and a stringent one, satisfied not by obeying rules or calculating outcomes, but by conducting oneself in uncertain circumstances with certain dignity and with a certain grace. The imperative of the blues is to transform disruptions into opportunities. Thus, the "blues-idiom dancer" or "solo instrumentalist" is not "disconcerted by intrusions, lapses, shifts in rhythm, intensification of tempo ... but is inspired by them to higher and richer levels of improvisation." The blues artist is not cowed or intimidated by the adversities of black American life. To the contrary: he or she takes "disruptions" and "discontinuities" to be enabling things, the very conditions of artistic and cultural development. To act as if "obstacles are really opportunities and ... chaos is constructive" is a form of heroic action; and so the blues hero takes ideas and structures—no matter how fine—not as end points but as "points of departure," occasions for "counterstatement" and "experiment."

In two books, *The Hero and the Blues* (1973) and *Stomping the Blues* (1976), Murray bluntly dismissed those who would reduce the blues to a cry of despair, a primitive folk form, or an exclusive racial preserve. Like all art forms, he has argued, the blues improvisation allows an artist to "summarize a basic attitude toward experience" by "extending, elaborating, and refining (which is to say ragging, jazzing, and riffing and even jamming) the idiomatic into fine art." In *The Hero and the Blues*, Murray illustrated the "transforming of raw experience" into "style" with this description of a Duke Ellington "blues-extension concerto":

> The solo instrument states, asserts, alleges, quests, requests, or only implies, while the trumpets in the background sometimes mock and sometimes concur as the "woodwinds" moan or groan in the agony and ecstasy of sensual ambivalence and the trombones chant concurrence or signify misgivings and even suspicions (which are as likely to be bawdy as plaintive) with the rhythm section attesting and affirming.

The blues vocabulary of solos, heads, riffs, call-and-response patterns, and breaks generates a complex structure, expressive of the tuggings of human feeling, an exuberant world in which "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)" is raised to the level of an ethical and epistemological principle. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the music of Ellington, "by far the most comprehensive orchestration of the sound and beat of life in the United States ever accomplished by a single composer."

Two tensions recur often in Murray's work, as suggestive as they are perplexing. First, he defines a distinctively black aesthetic even while insisting on the centrality of cultural miscegenation. Second, he invests art with the weighty mythic function of representing an entire community to itself even as he articulates an aesthetics of weightlessness, and prizes daring improvisation and restless invention. Every anecdote, for Murray, is an adventure, and every adventure has a hero. But this heroism is oddly unstable, and impossible to make into marble. Murray's hero corrects the burden of embodying his community's aspirations with the freedom to approach all situations with his own "pragmatic improvisatory irreverence."

The hero and narrator of Murray's two novels is known to us only by his nickname, Scooter. *Train Whistle Guitar*, published in 1974, traced Scooter's childhood against an intricate background of characters and conversation in the small Alabama town of Gasoline Point. *The Spyglass Tree*, its sequel, arrives now, seventeen years later, Murray's first book of any kind in over a decade. Here, Scooter attends an unnamed college clearly modeled on Murray's own. (In his travelogue and memoir, *South to a Very Old Place*, published in 1971, Murray first added to the argumentative style of his essays a more personal tone, including an affectionate and amusing recollection of his liberal arts education at Tuskegee.) But the book moves forward only fitfully, alternating episodes of college life and the memories of Gasoline Point that those episodes evoke. Murray plans to complete a trilogy; the third volume will presumably remove Scooter from his Southern schooldays into the Northern city.

Murray once coined the term "social-science fiction" to describe such writers as Claude Brown who, in his view, substituted sociological clichés for their own experience. Working without a strong literary tradition to rely on, black writers are often tempted to lean on the crutches of sociology and myth, sentimentality and sensationalism. Murray doesn't seem to have lost a lot of sleep

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over this. He writes a rich, natural, vernacular English, mixing in learned allusions and complex time sequences with ease. Often he seems to be aspiring in prose to the poise of his college roommate, who would stroll across campus "mentioning such unheard-of avant-garde writers as James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, and Gertrude Stein as casually as if they were boxers, baseball or football players, and movie stars."

In *The Spyglass Tree,* Murray downplays the traditional coming-of-age story, understating the usual climactic discoveries of manhood and racial identity. Scooter wears his representative selfhood lightly. His heroism is a fragile and tentative achievement, not a finished product. Although his trajectory from Gasoline Point is set in allegorical terms as a "journey" from the "briar patch" up the "bean stalk" to the "castle towns" of the North, the novel works less in its mythical patterning than in its detailed layering of perceptions and memories, sights and sounds, ideas and feelings discarded and recalled.

Murray's tale is essentially an autobiographical examination of "horizons of aspiration" as they existed for poor blacks in the South during the Depression. It concerns the act of becoming one of the "talented tenth" and attending an elite black institution like Tuskegee; the simultaneous isolation from one's community and burden of representing it that come with this role; and the cosmopolitan delights of jazz, modern literature, and the Northern city that beckon to the young and ambitious student. The black community in the book is close-knit, and uneasily independent of the white world. When vigilantes threaten, its members rally together efficiently, and without self-pity.

Most of the early chapters function as short sketches: Scooter meeting his playfully erudite roommate, thinking of his solemn schoolteachers, reading and flirting in the campus library, remembering rambles in the woods. The second half revolves around the beating that a white storekeeper administers to a black laborer for cashing his paycheck with another black man, the proud entrepreneur Giles Cunningham. But the novel relies more on its prose than its plot. Vigors of language displace the comforts of nostalgia and the dangers of prejudice. Murray moves fluently among different voices; his writing is scored carefully to the occasion. Somewhat in the manner of Faulkner, he alternates thick descriptions, bursts of highly idiomatic speech, and involved interior monologues. The rousing sounds of racial uplift ("who if not you") meet half-bitter voices of realism: "after all, this is jook joint junction." A little like Lester Young, Murray can make a long line swing gently:

> She looked and moved and also sounded so much like the crepe myrtle-cape jasmine beautiful tea-cake perfect tan brown-skin storybook princess that I had always looked forward to meeting and making myself worthy of some time later on along the way from the spyglass tree to the also and also of whatever and wherever.

But, evoking trouble, he calls up ungainly sentences laden with "but"s, "it"s, and "because"s in the uneven rhythms of agitated thought.

Rather than lingering over the representations of crisis and discomfort, Murray's fiction communicates the affections of a poor Southern black community, the feelings and the skills of its members. The local blues heroes, fictional models of daring and endurance, include the itinerant singer Luzana Cholly and the "money ball pitcher" Gus the Gator, who would nonchalantly drive up to a ballpark in the eighth inning of a tight game and let the opposing teams bid for his relief services. Verbal dexterities are most on display in the local barbershops, whose spirited proprietors hold forth with insight and wit:

> When these goddamn crybabies gang around talking about Cat Rogers this and Cat Rogers that, I tell them when you get yourself enough votes to get rid of Cat Rogers, you won't even have to get rid of him because he going to be seeing to it that you getting your little taste just like everybody else. Now that's politics, pardner, and that's what democracy is all about. Don't care what they got in them books up there.... Say boy, goddamn! Is your head shaped like this or is I'm cutting it like this?

To be sure, Murray's small-town heroes have been glimpsed before, and sometimes his nostalgic affection for them risks sentimentality, or at least an incompletely warranted optimism. Subjects of racism and alienation are relegated to the sidelines, background melodies to the main themes of unhampered memory and heroic ambition. When sinister forces threaten, visions of the innocent past and the promising future subdue them. The line between overcoming obstacles and ignoring them is not always easy to draw. Perhaps deliberately, Murray's portrait of Tuskegee contains none of the mannered delirium that distinguishes Ellison's picture of the school in *Invisible Man.* And *The Spyglass Tree*'s weakest link is its conclusion, in which the college's great white benefactor joins the forces of self-defense and plain old good luck to save the day for the black community. It is as if Ellison's banker Mr. Norton, a deranged trustee of the college lost in his self-regarding sense of mission and unable to cope with black life beyond the campus gates, had never been created. In Murray's Alabama, the conflicts of black and white, town and gown, rich and poor, work and fun, blues music and church music, arise only to be gently defused.

At the end of *The Spyglass Tree,* Scooter sits in an Oldsmobile with his new stand-up bass, dreaming of the "patent-leather avenues" of the North. We feel the surge of aspiration and possibility that pushes him on, the sense in which obstacles are to be welcomed as "opportunities for antagonistic cooperation." Yet we also feel some of the limits of Murray's vision and of the "storybook hero" form that he conflates with all literature. For surely not all obstacles are opportunities for improvisation and development. Some hurt too much, some stand too tall. And contrary to the belief of Scooter's roommate, not all books resemble the "data on timetables, maps, and mileage charts." Some are guides to contemplation, not transportation. In places, Murray's incantations of "horizons of possibility" and "ancestral imperatives" sound vague and evasive.

Still, those places are a small price to pay for Murray's achievement. He has not only mounted a successful challenge to the insulting and distorting reductions of experts and demagogues; he has also put in their place his own profound interpretations of black experience, and animated those interpretations in a fictional world. By working disruption and discontinuity so thoroughly into his forward-looking vision, he has raised himself above the common consolations of "self-esteem" and "victimhood" alike. Finally he measures individuals not by their degrees of "empowerment" or "disempowerment," but by their resources of imagination and invention, by their resilience in the face of circumstances. Of course, other markers are also legitimate, also necessary. Murray does not wish to deny the hard facts, he wishes only to deny that all the hard facts are equally hard. With his perfect assurance and his engaging style, Murray himself has elevated the standards of "elastic individuality" and "esthetic receptivity" that he champions. He has found a way to lift the spirit soberly. •

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BOMBAY DIARIST

Jew in the crown

THE PREOCCUPATIONS OF MIDDLE-class Bombay resemble not a little those of New York City. Judging by the time I spent there over the winter holidays, real estate, rent control, commuting, car theft, and the homeless are the leading topics of conversation. Apartments are described in awe-struck tones as costing twelve or twenty lakhs of rupees. For a few days I misheard this term as "lakes," and thought it a poetic image of vast expense. In fact, a lakh turns out to be Hindish for 100,000. This means that a tiny flat can easily cost $40,000. The consequence is that people lucky enough to have residences keep them forever. Four generations of the family I stayed with live in as many rooms, despite their relative prosperity. Staying in such intimate quarters made it easier to grasp the poignancy of *Disha*, a three-hour, Hindi-language tragicomedy-musical-epic about Bombay now showing at a theater nowhere near you. The running joke of the film is that every time the young newlyweds start to get romantic, someone arrives wanting to borrow their bed.

BUILT ON AN ISLAND, BOMBAY CAN expand only vertically. The pressure brought to bear on limited housing stock by migration from the villages is everywhere visible; an early-morning outing reveals hundreds of people sleeping rough on the pavement. Shacks sprout wherever space permits—onto the runways of the airport, in what used to be parks, and along the sea front. The luckier of Bombay's industrial workers live in so-called chawls, derelict mill residences of several stories. A local developer explains that because the rents are fixed at 1940s levels, landlords refuse to spend anything on maintenance, hoping the buildings will collapse, as they often do during monsoon season. This permits them to sell the land for fantastic sums. The tenants, however, try to spend just enough on the structures to stave off evacuation orders. The developer reminds us not to give to beggars: so long as they can earn a living on handouts, people will keep flocking to Bombay, where there is nowhere to live.

AFTER A FEW DAYS OF NEWSPAPER withdrawal, I habituated myself to *The Times of India*, drawn by its slogan: "One of the World's Six Great Newspapers" (begging the question of what the other five are). Though written in a kind of English, much of the paper remained beyond my comprehension. Even after several weeks, I remained totally flummoxed by stories with headlines like "AISSF (M) to Participate in All-Party Meet," which after repeated inspection would fail to yield any clues about what AISSF (M) might happen to be. Political parties in India often don't last long enough for you to learn their names, which makes following domestic politics akin to learning a complicated new sport in which all the players keep switching teams. Another worrisome aspect is that those "46 killed in bus plunge" stories, usually found near the bottom of page A34 in *The New York Times*, are hardly bigger news in the country where they happen.

INDIAN JOURNALISTS are masters, however, at rendering stories of sex and violence with an understated luridness. One encounters numerous headlines like: "Minor Girl Sexually Exploited" ("though the details are disgusting, even the gist of the contents would suffice to indicate the prolonged ordeal to which the girl was subjected") or "Woman Killed by Panther in Vasai" ("From a distance, the villagers tried to shoo the cat away with stick and frighten it with noise but the panther did not budge"). Then there is the matrimonial section. Though not quite at the "Studs" level of frankness on sexual matters, the ads are remarkably explicit about requirements of age, income, religions, caste, and skin color. There's a separate section for Brahmans, and many of the ads read "only high caste need apply." Headings appear for "cosmopolitans" and Indians with American green cards. Again, guessing at the intended meaning is a cheerful pastime. "For Sunni Muslim Syed boy 25/180 engineer father businessman. A homely religious medico girl. Photos if possible." Or: "Wanted fair well educated Tamil girl for Vadama Anusham boy 26 manager in multinational bank in Bombay. Reply with full details and horoscope." Perhaps not so different from the California dating scene after all.

IN PLACE OF A GUIDEBOOK I worked my way through V. S. Naipaul's three books: *An Area of Darkness*, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, and *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. Though these are each worthwhile, I wouldn't recommend them to the first-time visitor. Naipaul is obsessed by the unclean, and he sees India's dirtiness as a symptom not of poverty or ignorance, but of a profound cultural failing. Again and again he describes the "horror" of Indian lavatories. He elevates the absence of flush toilets to a moral and intellectual issue: public defecation is related to the Indian lack of historical consciousness, to the inability to observe and describe, to intellectual "parasitism," to the belief that the material world is one of illusion. Traveling in India, one encounters myriad minor annoyances and aggravations. Naipaul presses a federal case over each, staring relentlessly in all the places where the tourist's instinct would otherwise be to avert his eyes. Unenlightened, you might be amused by the bank clerk who takes forty minutes to cash your traveler's check. With Naipaul's help, you can't help being whipped into a righteous fury.

NAIPAUL'S MOST RECENT book about India is 520 pages long and took fourteen months to write, as against 267 pages in twenty-four months for his first book about India and 191 pages in fourteen months for his second. Chalk it up to word processing. It's a shame that Naipaul has taken leave of concision, since the certain result is that very few people will read his latest through to a conclusion that is to my mind one of the finest things he has written. After condemning, despising, and rejecting India for three decades, Naipaul has come to see its tribulations with greater tolerance. "People everywhere have ideas now of who they are and what they owe themselves," he writes. India has become a country of "a million mutinies, supported by twenty kinds of group excess, sectarian excess, religious excess, regional excess." Yet in the rising of these numberless rebellions, he finds not the seeds of destruction, but a demonstration of the power of the idea of a secular, democratic India. "Excess was now felt to be excess in India. What the mutinies were also helping to define was the strength of the general intellectual life, and the wholeness and humanism of the values to which all Indians now felt they could appeal." In maturity, Naipaul has purged both his arrogance and his hysteria. So seldom is this writer sanguine about anything that when he tinges his jaundice with optimism, it's cause for celebration.

JACOB WEISBERG

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Poor Kids in Crumbling Schools

By Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers

Most people know that some of our schools are poorly equipped and housed in run-down buildings, but few even imagine the conditions Jonathan Kozol describes in *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (New York: Crown, 1991). Kozol visited schools in a number of cities, and he's appalled by the conditions in which many poor children go to school. He's also appalled by the contrast between these wretched places and the lavishly equipped suburban schools that are often only a few minutes' drive away. He asks why we don't have any sense of "moral urgency" about this terrible injustice.

The schools Kozol visited were filthy and decrepit. Imagine a high school that had to be closed twice in one year because the toilets overflowed. Or one where a stairwell became a waterfall when it rained, and the dust from crumbling plaster turned students' hair white.

Many of the schools were incredibly crowded. One elementary school was a converted skating rink. Its "capacity" was 900 kids, but 1300 were going to school there in windowless rooms. And many schools didn't have the most basic equipment—like enough books. A history teacher with 110 students had 26 textbooks, some of which had the first 100 pages missing. In some schools, teachers brought their own paper and supplies; in others, kids had no toilet paper.

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But what really arouses Kozol's indignation is that these schools are not in some poor developing nation. They're in the United States, sometimes only a few miles from schools where other kids broadcast from their own television stations and swim in Olympic-sized pools. Kozol finds the injustice of this especially galling because the U.S. prides itself on offering equality of opportunity. And galling because most of the kids in these poor schools are African-American or Hispanic. It's like a return to the days before *Brown* v. *Board of Education* overturned the principle of separate but equal schools. Or maybe it's worse because no one even pretends these schools are equal.

Kozol's denunciation of the conditions in which many poor children go to school will make a lot of people feel guilty—as it's meant to. It should also make them think about how to change these conditions. But they should know that there are no easy solutions.

Kozol comes out for equalization—spending the same amount of money (if not more) on schools in poor neighborhoods as in wealthy ones. Since wealthy neighborhoods can raise much more in property taxes, he suggests a Robin Hood solution: Take from the rich and give to the poor. This is simple justice, but it may have some undesirable consequences.

In countries that have always had national systems, schools have always been funded equally. Our tradition of local schools supported by local taxes has created a different set of expectations. People are used to deciding how much they want to spend on their schools. And they look on spending money for schools outside their district as something like foreign aid.

Furthermore, if school funding is equalized on a state level, it won't be possible to bring all schools up to the level of the best-funded schools. Some kids will get less than they had before. And parents who are used to paying for what they want—and getting what they pay for—may be angry enough to join a tax revolt or withdraw their kids and their support from public schools.

Even if every state equalized education spending, we still wouldn't have total fairness because some states spend more on education than others. The logic of equalization would point to federal regulation of education spending, but this, too, would run up against our tradition of local control and our fear of having public education dictated from Washington. You can call these historically ingrained feelings selfish; that doesn't make them go away. And you can ignore them at your peril.

That's the lesson of equalization in California. As Kozol admits, backlash against equalization there was responsible for Proposition 13, which capped most property taxes and led to the decline of public education in California. And that's the lesson Governor Florio has learned in New Jersey, where a Republican legislature has been elected expressly to roll back the taxes that were supposed to equalize school spending. It's not enough to do what's right; you also have to ask what the consequences will be. In New Jersey, the consequences are that Florio's program for equalization may be wiped out. And nobody is likely to try anything similar for a long time to come.

This doesn't mean that, because we can't create absolute equality, we can't do anything. Old people in this country used to die because they couldn't afford to see a doctor or even buy enough to eat. Now, we have policies that provide them with medical care and income maintenance. We don't have absolute equality, but we've greatly improved the situation.

We could do that for schools, too. We could set minimum state standards to make sure that no child ever had to go to schools like the ones Kozol describes. And we could enforce those standards.

Marxists always said that American social legislation offered mere band-aids instead of the revolutionary changes that were needed. But when they tried to put their revolutionary changes into action, they fell on their faces. You can call the things we can do for kids in impoverished schools "mere band-aids"; but they will make a difference.

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